JAMES B. HENDRYX—*in the North* - - - NEIL MARTIN—*in Australia*

"Murder Isn't Everything"—Kingsley Smith

Short Stories

Twice A Month

September 10th

25c

Gold crazy in the Cattle Country!

by Gordon Ray Young

Part I

"RED CLARK'S SHORT CUT"

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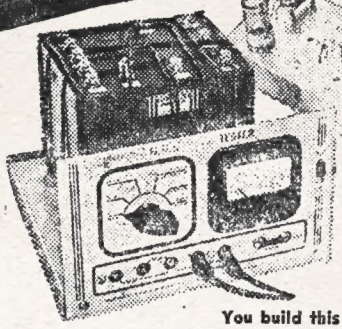

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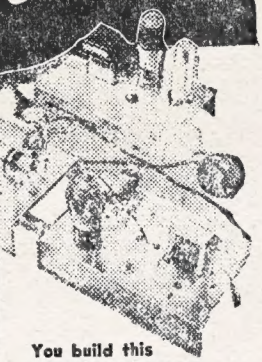

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Short Stories

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THE BEST OF AMERICA'S ACTION ADVENTURE MYSTERY

THE STORY TELLERS' CIRCLE 4

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EDITOR
D. McILWRAITH

ASSOCIATE EDITOR
LAMONT BUCHANAN

September 10th, 1946

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Except for personal experiences the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental.

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WILLIAM J. DELANEY, *President and Treasurer.* M. DELANEY, *Secretary.*

The Story Tellers' Circle

No "Short Cuts" to Stories

"'RED CLARK'S SHORT CUT' is pure fiction," writes Gordon Ray Young. "There's virtually no basis of actualities in any of it . . . and yet . . ."

It's a big "and yet" we suspect. For no writer, we believe, makes up entirely the things he writes about. No, rather they seem to be the result of actual experiences, some half-forgotten, he himself has been through.

As Gordon Young says:

"In a way there is much mingling of old hearsay and campfire talk and some wholly unromantic experiences in this yarn—such as being in the mountains on horseback and not knowing where the hell I was and not greatly caring, which helped, or seemed to help, the writing of Red's being there. Perhaps I merely thought so: there is often a vast difference between what a writer has in mind and what he conveys to the reader. That difference becomes apparent when a fellow rereads old stories that perhaps he once thought were very good—and he must wonder why the devil an editor bought the stuff.

"When he is working on a story every writer finds old and seemingly inconsequential memories bobbing up and taking their place with a kind of kaleidoscopic effectiveness; that is, his memory's loose bits of colored glass, and such, seem to fall into a pattern. Many such trifles appear in this—and everything else I write; perhaps they take on an exaggerated coloring that seems necessary in romantic adventure. As a matter of plain speaking, the cowboy's life was sometimes dull, tedious, hard and he gets most of his romantic coloration from the infrequent wild sprees in town. He was self-reliant, observant, with an odd and almost unique gift for expressive phrasing. But he liked the life—even as old-time sailors loved their hard way of life. The present dude-ranch glamor is as false in garb and antics as rouge and silk stockings would be on an old-time mountain woman."

Gordon Ray Young

Bikini Business

NOT so long ago we were perusing an account of the target run of the atomic bomb plane at Bikini. The part of the report (from International News Service) that interested us the most was the revelation by the plane's navigator that a while before the bomber came in on the target the pilot and co-pilot had shifted to the automatic controls while they themselves proceeded to pour over a copy of WEIRD TALES magazine!

Now WEIRD TALES is a member of the same publishing family as SHORT STORIES, and issued from these same offices. So, of course, we were interested and pleased.

It gives us a feeling of gratifying useful-

(*Continued on page 6*)

In Your Mind's Eye

The Secret of MENTAL CREATING

IF you just like to dream, read no further. There comes a time when your fancies *must be* brought into light—and stand the test of every-day, hard realities. Are you one of the thousands—perhaps millions—whose thoughts never get beyond the stage of *wistful wishing?* Do you often come to from a daydream with the sigh, "If only I could bring it about—*make it real?*"

All things begin with thought—it is what follows that may take your life out of the class of those who hope and dream. Thought energy, like anything else, can be dissipated—or it can be made to produce actual effects. *If you know how to place your thoughts* you can stimulate the creative processes within your mind—through them you can assemble things and conditions of your world into a happy life of accomplishment. *Mental creating* does not depend upon a magical process. It consists of *knowing how* to marshal your thoughts into a power that draws, compels and organizes your experiences into a worth-while design of living.

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The ROSICRUCIANS
(AMORC)

SAN JOSE CALIFORNIA

The Story Tellers' Circle

(*Continued from page 4*)

ness to know that men engaged in such a deadly serious mission as the atom bomb test, turn naturally to a magazine for relaxation and enjoyment. And, of course, it's doubly nice if that magazine happens to be one of our own.

But we couldn't help wondering. With all due respect to the crew of that bomber, would the boys have come a little closer to hitting the target ship *Nevada* if they'd been reading SHORT STORIES instead of WEIRD TALES!*

* Don't take us seriously, fellows, we're only kiddin'.

Australian Big-Boy

NEIL MARTIN'S "Unfinished Business" (story of the same name in this issue of SHORT STORIES) consists of telling us something interesting about the Australian Aborigine, alias the "Blackfellow."

"This man," writes Martin, *"is in a class by himself. Ranging from five feet eight inches to six feet in height, with wavy black hair, flat nose, heavy brow arches and receding chin, he resembles no other living human. And while his skin is dark, he is not a Negro, although he has much of the African brother's happy disposition, as well as his kindliness and courtesy.*

"There is, however, much divergence in physical types. Natives of the well-watered coastal regions are mentally and physically superior to their kinsmen of the arid interior. But regardless of where they live, they are hunters, trackers and foragers par excellence, supporting themselves in regions where white men would—and very often do—starve. All have intricate tribal and social customs, to which they are reasonably faithful.

"When civilized, they often become excellent stockmen and horse-breakers, while others succeed in such trades as boat-building. But on the whole, they avoid steady employment, preferring the nomadic existence of their ancestors. Weapons are the same in all tribes. Spears, sometimes tipped with flint, or with glass chipped from insulators stolen from telegraph lines, are used with 'woomerahs,' or spear throwers. They also use boomerangs, of which there are several kinds, stone axes and stone knives. But never guns. For to firearms, Commonwealth law says 'Nix!'

"They are gradually but surely passing from the scene. Numbering about 300,000 at the time of the first white settlement, there are only about 50,000 today. And their number is rapidly decreasing."

Neil Martin

Diamond Glitters

CHALL THOMPSON'S "A Pitcher's Got to Throw" put us in a reminiscent mood. As this issue goes to press Boston in the American and Brooklyn in the National are leading their respective leagues. This department strongly suspects that the Red Sox will be one sure end of the World Series, but doubts that the Dodgers will last in the Senior Circuit. We like the Cardinals over the Flatbush Furious and don't entirely discount the Cubs.

In line with Thompson's yarn, though, we got thinking of past pennant drives and World Series. From the days of teeth-gritting Bill Dineen, Red Sox pitcher in the first modern World Series (1903) and the fabulous Christy Mathewson in '05 right down to the Dean boys ("Me an' Paul'll get 'em!") in '34 and the incredible Buck Newsom who strutted through two Series wins despite the death of his father in the middle of the classic, a pitcher has always been the big, big man in baseball.

To be sure there've been great hitting stars and fielding stars—and the crowds best love the sluggers—but if you have to pick the key man or men of a stretch drive or Series, more often than not they turn out to be the fellows that rear up and let go down those 60 feet from the mound.

We think it'll often be that way, too. For focussing our long-range telescope, we predict now that the baseball world will be hearing plenty from two pitching gentlemen by the name of Howie Pollet and Tex Hughson come next October's Series.

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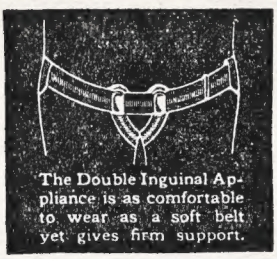
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Heartily Recommends Brooks Fitting

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Part I

RED CLARK'S SHORT CUT

By GORDON RAY YOUNG

I

AS HE rode down the mountain the wind stirred the pines and he sang to himself though he was about the same as lost and had been warned that the Mollogons were a hideout for Jack Kellem's outlaws; but he had stubbornly headed into the mountains as a short cut to Verde Valley where a man he knew had asked him to come. The packhorse trailed like a dog, the sun and stars told him which way to keep going and he wasn't in a hurry. He hooked trout and ate deer meat and slept late on pine boughs, and sort of half-wished he

Red Had Never Met Such a Girl; She Told Lies Just as Easy as She Breathed

couldn't find his way out of the Mollogons for a long, long time. When he felt the need of a little company he sang to himself, as now. He couldn't carry a tune but his voice was strong and he liked the song about a black-eyed girl who loved the poor cowboy and wouldn't harken to the blandishments of the ornery old rich man. Overhead the wind made a sobbing sound in the pines as if very saddened by the ballad—or the way he sang it.

His horse picked a way down the deer trail and he lifted his voice in a quivering wail: "So she spurned the gold of the man who was old—"

A sharp thin voice from behind a tree ahead said, "Halt, you!"

He had been through a lot of smoke and was cat-quick in taking care of himself; but now, off guard, he was caught hands down and peered through the dense shade to where a rifle rested against the side of a tree. He couldn't see the sheltered figure clearly but it was a woman's, so he kept hold of the reins as he raised his hands, palm-out shoulder-high.

"My singin' that bad, lady?"

The girl's face came more clearly into view. "Mister, your singin' is all the reason you ain't dead—now!" Then, "Dad'll maybe larrup hell out of me for not shootin' —like I been told to!"

He grinned and pushed back his hat. "I wouldn't want a pretty girl larruped!"

She stepped into the trail and the rifle came to rest with the butt against her hip, the muzzle lifted. Her eyes were dark, her face dark, and she had lots of tangled hair falling about her shoulders. She was young, pretty and her smile showed white teeth. "Who are you?"

"Me, I'm Red Clark of Tulluco. A cowhand heading for the Verde Valley."

"Maybe that ain't so!"

"It is, but what if it's not?"

"Nobody's got a call to ever come this way. Anybody that does is liable to be snoopin'! I can't shoot a man that's singing. But I can't let you go till Dad says so, and he'll be powerful mad that you come this way at all!"

Red thought it over, guessed that her dad was an outlaw in hiding; and he wanted no truck with outlaws, not even with one who had a pretty daughter and had been nice enough—she said—not to shoot because he was singing.

"If I go my way and shut up my singing, your dad won't need to know."

She was instantly savage with, "You're not goin'!" Her eyes snapped and the rifle came breast-high with her body slightly forward and tense. She meant what she said: "You just ain't!"

Red told himself, *I'm in a pickle!* His rifle was under his leg, his revolvers were in the tied-down holsters on his hips, and as long as she didn't make him drop his reins and reach high overhead, he figured he could have more than an equal break because he was fast and tricky and good. But she was a girl. He thought about ducking low to one side as he put spurs into the flanks of his lean black horse and riding her down.

But she might shoot the horse, which would leave him afoot; and anyhow she would probably drop the packmare that was nibbling at brush tips. But what restrained such planning was that he'd never in his life hurt a woman, and just wouldn't—ever. Or so he thought.

Red said mildly, "Look, lady. I'm just a cowhand heading for a job. I don't know who your dad is and don't care. Let me ride by and I won't look back, or tell that I've seen you."

"No!" Then she warned, "Now don't you move, Mister!"

AND, keeping her eyes on his face, she tipped the rifle slightly and fired three times fast. Red's gun-trained horse scarcely blinked. The packmare poked her ears out, inquiringly, then nibbled again. The echoes faded and the only sound was the wind in the pines. She had signalled *Danger!* to her father. He might be far off or he might be near. Red didn't feel that he had anything really to be worried about.

He said, "You handle that gun like you knew how!"

Again her smile showed the white teeth, pleased. "And you don't act scairt!"

"How long I got to set here like a bump on a log, waiting for your father?"

She answered shrewdly, "Maybe he's watching now, sizin' you up!"

There seemed nothing better to do than sit quietly. "How do you like living in the mountains?"

"It's lonesome. Just me and Dad. In two-three years you're the first livin' soul I've spoke to!"

Red nodded. Her voice had a soft ripple, like water bubbling over a rock. *Pretty, too,* he thought, not remembering that he nearly always thought any girl pretty.

She didn't say much more. He could tell that she was expecting her father and maybe dreaded the larruping. Her eyes slid from his face with a listening strain, and when he asked, "Can I roll a smoke?" she looked staringly, then decided, "All right, I reckon."

He made the cigarette, reached down and scratched the sulphur match along his thigh, put the match out carefully. She was not at ease and seemed to sniff the wind like a nervous deer, and Red guessed it was because there hadn't been an answering shot or shout. He waited until he had smoked the cigarette and pinched it out between spit-moistened fingertips. Then:

"Listen, lady. You've got grit all right and know how to handle a rifle, but you ought've made me put my hands up high and keep 'em there. When I lit that match my hand got right to my gun butt and I could've pulled it and shot—if I'd been a snooper like you think, and didn't want to be caught. That proves I ain't, so why can't I ride on?"

She gazed at him solemnly. "It's not like Dad not to answer or come."

"Maybe he's too far off to hear."

"He's never too far off 'cause the mine—" She stopped as if a rough hand had gripped her throat, and her eyes lighted with a look like guilty confession.

Red grinned and shook his head at her. All he knew about mines was that they were holes in the ground; but he had run across prospectors here and there and found some of them tight-mouthed and suspicious, in dread of snoopers, fearful that the treasure they imagined they had would be jumped. So, all at once, he guessed that the father he had thought an outlaw was a miner who believed he had the rainbow's pot of gold under the next push or two of his shovel, and didn't want any stranger to know about it.

Red said, "It's silly, you standing and me settin' here this way, and it won't be long to sundown. So either let me go or take me wherever your dad is."

Her lips flashed, "You're not a Kellem rider?"

"That outlaw bunch—me? I'd lie if I was, but I'm not lyin'. So if that's what you're afraid of, I'll hang my guns on the horn and walk in front of you—the which no outlaw would ever do, willin'ly."

"My dad's a powerful man and—and he won't like you!" Then, rather as if letting Red know the fault wasn't his own: "Dad don't like anybody. Not even me lots of times!"

Having said that she stared at him curiously, rather (he later decided) as if he were a kind of jumping-jack and she was wondering how to work the strings.

He didn't say anything more about taking off his guns, but stepped from the saddle and took off his battered hat, polite as a preacher at a funeral. "Just show me the way. I've got a camp to make yet tonight." Then he clucked to the packmare.

The girl, older than he had thought, stood and looked at him eagerly, without shyness, and seemed studying about the strings that make a jumping-jack jump.

Red was lanky, red-headed, thin of face; his nose was long and he was as tanned as weathered leather, but his eyes were blue as a jaybird's bluest feather. The handkerchief about his neck was red, the faded wool shirt blue, and he wore a vest that was frayed at the pockets. The bibless overalls were faded and brass-bound and drawn down over the tops of his boots. His wide belt was ringed with double loops, all filled with brass-headed cartridges, and the long revolvers were in old holsters with thongs from the tip of the holsters tied below his knees. Whether she knew it or not, the guns and the way he wore them was a sign—almost a challenge—to all and sundry that he believed himself as good as anybody with guns and wasn't going to be picked on.

She said, "Come on," and walked ahead, which seemed sudden trustfulness. The girl wore moccasins and was bare-legged; the short skirt came barely below her knees and made her look small. The thick hair was a dark fluffy cloud on her shoulders and back, and she had a straight back and a long gliding stride.

She's not very smart! he thought, thinking of how trusting she had become. Then he revised that with, *Or maybe she is smart —very!*

She picked a twisted course through the pines and around boulders, now and then glancing back, and it wasn't easy to follow. His long sharp boot heels sank like pegs in the pine needles and the spurs dragged. She wasn't following a path. Red thought about getting into the saddle and riding off, but tree limbs hung low and would check the horse, and there were lots of rocks to make hard riding risky. If he tried to bolt it would cause her to think he ought to be shot and maybe she could shoot good.

He plodded along, leading the horses around trees she had passed under, and he saw that she watched when he made a detour; but for every backward look she gave him, she sent others this way and that, searchingly, as if there were somebody else nearby of whom she was more afraid than of Red. *Her father,* he guessed, already not liking the father.

THEY came to a clearing by the river where a cabin was under the face of a dark bluff, and the bluff, a hundred yards or so off, looked like it had been sliced smooth by a big knife made out of lightning. Rocks near its base were scattered and piled up as if baby giants had once played nursery games with them, and all about in the clearing stumps stood up, short and jagged.

It was well past mid-afternoon and shad-

ows blanketed the clearing and the night chill was coming in. A man could be waiting behind any of a hundred rocks or stumps, but the thought didn't bother him because he felt that no miner would shoot a stranger.

The girl didn't go into the cabin but looked toward the deep shadows upstream, beyond the bluff and, putting two fingers into her mouth, whistled three times in a way that sent echoes afar. She waited, listeningly. No reply. The wind kept up its *shuash* and the stream chattered.

She turned to Red. "I'm scairt! That's not like Dad!"

He asked, "What's your name?"

"Peg."

"All right, Peg. If you think your dad's maybe had some trouble, like a bad fall, just let me water and stake out my horses, then I'll help do whatever you say."

She said something quick and short and he didn't hear clearly, but thought it sounded like, "I hope he's dead!" What he did hear then was, "Better not. Your horses, I mean. There are cats! They killed our burros. There's a kind of stable up there under the cliff. You put them there if—if he'll let you stay the night." Then, "Doubt if he will!" she added rapidly, sounding angered.

Red took the tarp-wrapped bedroll and other small belongings off the mare, unsaddled, unbuckled his spurs, and led the horses to the water where he got down on his belly and stuck his nose in the water to drink, too.

When he climbed back up to the cabin Peg was waiting, and with a look in her dark eyes that made him ask, "Now what's the matter?"

She had laid her rifle aside and eyed him strangely, yet answered "Nothin'," with evasive sullenness. Pause. Then with earnestness, "You ain't lied to me? You'll be killed if you have—" breathlessly—"maybe too if you ain't!"

Red's heart gave his ribs a couple of hard knocks as he guessed that now she knew her father was near and sizing him up, and he didn't like the feeling of a man's rifle on his back, but he grinned, "Pretty girls get lied to a lot, I hear, but so far not you by me!"

For a long moment she held her breath, then her words whirred at him like angry hornets, suddenly released. "How can I be pretty, just a mountain girl? Never see a soul and Dad always mad at me, or like he was! I hate it and want to go away! He's got gold. Gold, I tell you—a barrel full! That's why he's scairt and'll maybe kill you, but if you—*you!* You could take me with you, too!"

The trust of passion was in her eyes, pleading, promising, and her dark prettiness flamed; and she was suddenly lurefully wicked, offering herself and gold in a way that made his throat tight and dry. Red had never in his life before seen the stark naked evilness of a woman, and he wasn't tempted, but he was fascinated and muddled. He had heard about women that got fellows to do things they oughtn't, but outside of some dance-hall girls who didn't want anything more than to have a man spend his wages quick, he had never met such a woman; and had always believed, simple-mindedly, that they would be old, hard, cold and mean-looking.

Now when he said, "God A'mighty, woman, you just tryin' to see if I would?" he half-believed that was the way of it, and that she was trying to learn if he was the sort of fellow that couldn't be trusted.

She looked like she was about to cry, and maybe she was, but her eyes had a wild stare before she said, "Yes, yes, I did! But don't you tell him I said he had gold or he'll kill me, too! Go take your horses up yonder, quick!"

He started off the way she pointed, a rope on his horse's neck and the gentle packmare came along, unled. He followed a kind of path and reached the gloomy dimness of a rock-built shelter at the foot of the bluff that was part cave. The door, now open, was made of poles nailed together, without hinges, and when he took his horses into the small space he thought of a jail. It was a good place to corner a man, so he turned back to the doorway for a look, doubting that story about mountain lions.

HE CAME out and heaved the loose door into place, barring it with a heavy pole that fitted into niches cut out of the rock.

It was rapidly growing dark and he was full of troubled thoughts, so he rolled a cigarette, squatted down and smoked. It was, of course, his nature always to give a

woman the best of any doubts; and he wanted to think she had been testing him, but there had been such a tense upsurge of passion that her offer seemed real.

He argued with himself that if she hadn't made it seem real it wouldn't have been any kind of a test; and she knew that, so she had sort of drained the marrow right out of his bones and made him weak. That was how he felt, even if untempted. Some things a fellow just didn't do.

But she sure knows how to make a fellow want her! he admitted uneasily. Then he decided, *Only a damn-fool fellow though, 'cause she'd be no good and have some other fellow do it to him next!*

That reasoning, he felt, was good, but it didn't dispel the fascination she had flung at him; and he said to himself, *Mountain-girl? I never saw one in town stop your breath and make you weak in the knees like that!*

It was now dark. The stars were out but had no light in them, and heavy mountain shadows lay like a thick blanket. The wind, as always in the darkness, moved about in an unending search over the forest, and the stream talked to itself. Those were the only sounds. A lantern outlined the open cabin door, and when he stood up he felt the chill and thought of his coat tied behind the cantle.

He stepped cautiously because it was dark and the high heels were awkward on the steep narrow trail; and he hadn't gone twenty steps before he whirled as a dislodged rock came tumbling by him. He had heard, or thought he did, scrambling steps as when a man regains his footing after he has stepped on what gives way.

It riled Red that his nerves were on edge, but in a way lots had happened since his singing kept him from being shot out of the saddle by a girl who might get whipped for not shooting; and if her father really had a barrel of gold stored away, Red could understand why the man would be likely to shoot anybody that looked like a snooper.

He paused at the cabin doorway and looked through, unnoticed before he asked, "Can I come in?"

Peg had changed her dress and sat broodingly on a half-log bench from which the bark had been peeled. Her hair now was done up and made her look more mature, but still young and still pretty. There wasn't a stove, only a fireplace and a pot over a crane swung above the coals. A coffee pot was in the fireplace.

Red's heart kicked his ribs again as he took notice that the large one-room cabin hadn't any windows. That was the way he'd seen some adobes built to stand off Indian raids along about the time he was big enough to hang onto a saddle-horn. Even if a man didn't have glass, he would cut holes in a cabin and tack up canvas in cold weather; but this was built like a block-house, even with pieces fitted in at about shoulder-high that could be used for loop-holes. There weren't any Indians roaming the Mollogons; and Jack Kellem's outlaws weren't likely to push this far back into the mountains—not if what Red had heard about them practically running the lower country was true. But the man who had built this cabin expected trouble.

Red wasn't much of a woodsman, though from building corrals and such he could swing an axe, but he saw that a craftsman had built and furnished this cabin, even if it had a dirt floor. Good-sized cabin, too, about 16 by 20, the logs close-fitting and tight-chinked. He moseyed over idly and had a look at the door. It was heavy and hung on three hand-hammered hinges.

HE THOUGHT of his coat and started out to where it was tied on the saddle, but his hands went up, this time high overhead, and he backed up slowly without a word being said. The man behind the rifle was tall and broad and bearded; his eyes had a kind of burning sulphur gleam. A powerful man and angered even if silent. He wore a revolver and knife too, and the clothes he had on, excepting boots, were frayed and patched. His nose was big and straight, and though his shoulders were bowed he was still tall. After he came into the cabin he held the rifle in one hand as easily as if it were a pistol, and his hands were scaly with calluses.

He backed Red against the wall and eyed him as he asked the girl, "Why didn't you kill him?" and the man's voice was strong and slow.

"He was singin'. I couldn't! He said he was a cowboy on his way to work. I shot for you to come and you never! I thought

you might be hurt or something, and he promised to stop till you'd seen him, and he did. If you'd been hurt he would have helped!" She said it all rapidly with a kind of defiance, as if braced against her father's disbelief.

The father said, slow and deliberate, "You're a fool or liar—both! Like your mother! Get up and take the guns off him! You left them on him—maybe hoping he'd shoot me! Wouldn't put it past you!" Then his sulphurous eyes turned on her. "All primped up too! Hair fixed and prettiest dress—just as soon as a man shows up! No better'n your mother, even if you don't look like her!"

The big man stood in the center of the room and though he did look aside, he could still shoot before Red could have got his hands down; but Red said:

"If you want to shoot me, I can't stop you. But you'll be crazy as you look if you do it thinkin' I'm nobody that can't be trusted!"

The man glared frowningly and took a step nearer as if better to look at a fellow who talked back with a rifle leveled down on him; then he said with the same hard deliberateness, "Your lies'll do you no good. I know why you're here! The only reason you ain't dead a'ready is because I want you to talk!"

Red thought the man crazy; he looked and talked it, and truth and facts wouldn't do any good if the man had a kink in his brain.

But Red talked back. "If you know why I'm here, you know I don't need to lie!"

"You're one of Kellem's bunch!"

"If so," Red told him, right off, "I'd have a letter in my pocket from Old Tom Watson askin' me to come down to work because the Kellems are running off so many of his cows, wouldn't I?"

Red brought a hand down, breast-high, and patted the vest. Then he took out the letter, at the same time bringing down his other hand, and he held out the envelope, offering it.

But this big black-bearded man wasn't that easily taken off guard and told him, with that queer kind of calmness for one who was so angered, "Put 'em up and keep 'em up till I make up my mind!"

Red let the letter fall to the ground and raised his hands again. "Till I make up my mind" had a slightly favoring sound as if the man was willing to listen to reason. So Red didn't say anything more but stood up against the wall and glanced toward the girl.

She hadn't stirred though told to get up and take off his guns, but sat with a straight back, her hands in her lap and gazed staringly at Red. Perhaps she knew that her father didn't always follow through with what he said, and might forget. Red hadn't noticed before—anyway she sat in shadows—but she was wearing a different dress, a pretty one with ruffles. He felt sort of funny in thinking that maybe she had prettied up for him.

Her father stooped on a bent knee to pick up the letter, then held it toward her. "Read this out loud while I keep an eye on him."

She got up readily and took the letter to the table where the lantern was and read the envelope: "Mr. Red Clark, Care of Jake Durham, Tahzo, New Mexico." Then she drew out the ruled paper, written on both sides with a lead pencil and was puzzled by the crabbed hand.

HER father said, "Don't take all night! You read fool books fast enough!"

"I can't read bad writin' good!" She looked at him sullenly and held out the letter, offering to show how difficult it was.

"Read it!" he said.

She read slowly, with pauses: "Dear Red, I want you to come down and work for me without anybody knowing you're hired or we're even friends. I'm getting old and all stove up and can't keep an eye on things like onct. Jack Kellem's bunch are running off my cows and he couldn't do it unless somebody I've got trust in was helping him, so I don't know who to blame. But I know damn well I can trust you—"

Peg paused, studyingly, as she bent nearer the lantern, and Red's ears twitched up as she added: "There's not enough gold in the Mollogons to make you throw in with a bad bunch." Not a word of that was in the letter.

Then she read: "Nell does the best she can, working like a man, but no woman can run a cow ranch good and people fool her."

The letter rambled on then concluded

with, "As ever, your friend, Tom Watson."

After that Peg folded the letter back into the envelope, laid it on the table and without a glance toward Red, she went to the fireplace and poked the coals.

The black-bearded man eyed Red, not friendly but with less the look of sour anger. "I know Tom Watson by hearsay. You are all-fired young to be a man like he says he wants, even if you are trigged out like a killer!" That referred to Red's two guns and the way he wore them, low and tied down.

Red told him, "Mr. Watson married my mother's sister and he helped heave me into a saddle before I could climb up. She died a long time ago and a few years back he married again. Married this Nell he spoke of. And I ain't what you call a 'killer'! I earn my wages honest. My dad was sheriff for twenty years and taught me bad men are bad only when they think they can shoot quicker'n other folks.

"Now," Red added, "you've spoiled any good I can be to Mr. Watson because you know what I'm down here for and can sell me out to the Kellem bunch—that you're so scared of!"

The girl straightened and turned, again staringly, as if holding her breath in dread of her father's anger at such plain speaking; but the black-bearded man let down the hammer of his rifle, then took it in his left hand, about midway on the barrel and didn't cover Red. So Red brought down his arms.

Peg went to the table, took up the envelope and said to Red, "You're not smart to keep the letter, for what if dad was a friend of the Kellems! You want that I burn it?"

Red told her, "Well, maybe you better."

She went to the fireplace and tore the envelope in two and threw the pieces on the coals, and now her father would never know about the part she had made up favoringly for Red; but he had watched her with a kind of far off hazy look, then said sort of to himself, "How'd Watson know there was gold in the Mollogons, I wonder?"

Red told him, "Now I'd like to get my horses and pull out."

"You're not goin' !" said the big man, his bowed shoulders giving him the look of about to rush at Red as the crazy sulphur light brightened in his eyes. "You've come to fight Kellems, so you can stay and help fight 'em! Why I couldn't answer Peg's signal today was because I was up on the peak watchin' riders try to get across the canyon." Now his voice didn't have a slow deliberateness, and he showed the kind of excitement that Red thought went with craziness.

"I saw two," he went on, "and know there's more because the two kept signaling. They're tryin' to find me and my mine! I've got gold—more gold than is any place else in the world!"

There was a kind of fury in the way he said it and Red tried to look disinterested and must have appeared unbelieving because the big man, still holding the rifle, ran a hand into his pocket and brought out a fist-full of dark copper-colored lumps. "I've got ore as rich with gold as honey in a comb!"

THE black-bearded miner was shaking his hand before Red's face and some nuggets, if they were nuggets, fell to the floor and were ignored. The old man—though he wasn't so old at that, having no gray in hair or beard—was crazy as a bat, so Red thought. Whether the stuff was gold or not, the fellow was crazy. Red looked toward the girl, and the way she looked back at him was scary because she seemed so afraid and, from what he had seen of her, Red knew that she didn't scare easily. But now her dark eyes were big and tightly stretched, her hands up on her breasts were clenched and her lips were parted as she held her breath.

Red didn't know how a fellow ought to talk to a crazy man that was, in a way, being friendly; so he said, "Maybe those fellows you saw are like me—just headed into the mountains. How can you know they're lookin' for you?"

"How know? You look at me!" He hit his breast with his fist. Red was looking at him as straight as he could. "My name is—well, it *ain't* Renard! Though that's all anybody knows me by, even her!" He swung his hand at the girl without glancing toward her. Then he glowered at Red who thought he had seen enough to understand why she would have desperate moods of wanting to get away, any way she could.

"I've been rich before!" Renard almost

shouted and straightened as if there were pride in remembrance; but almost at once the shoulders sagged again into the work-curved slump and he swept an arm, now accusingly, at the girl. "Then I married her mother!" Fury, or what looked like fury, was boiling in his eyes as he told Red, "She robbed me blind because I loved her! Don't ever love a woman! They're rotten-sweet and heartless-mean! All of 'em, like she'll be too!" His hot eyes slashed wickedly at the girl who seemed braced for another of the lashings she had often felt. "If a man ever trusts her! Look at her! Pretty and snake-sinful—like her mother! An actress!" he shouted. "That's how she fooled me—actin' sweet and nice, and all the time foolin' with other men!"

And though the cabin wasn't warm, drops of sweat, like water splashed on his face, rolled from Renard's forehead and down the sides of his nose, very much like the drip of tears.

Red felt kind of sorry for him, though sorrier for the girl who turned away as if it were an old story to her and, sitting down before the fireplace, put a coffee mill in her lap and began to grind for the supper.

Red propped his back to the wall and listened. Renard talked, now not very coherently but with powerful feeling. Red pieced together the disconnected information and learned, or guessed, that Renard had dragged the girl off into the loneliest part of the mountains and looked for gold; and, though tonight he talked like he hated her, he had other feelings at times too. He brooded over his wrongs and as she was the only one near, he blamed her for being a woman—the daughter of the woman who had tried to kill him, so he said.

But he didn't feel that way about Peg all the time. He had promised that they would go East to a big city and have whatever money could buy. He believed that he was rich, but greedily wanted all he could dig out, and was cunningly suspicious of every man. He had to have store food like coffee, sugar, flour and he hadn't any money, but he had gold.

Red wasn't sure that he understood rightly, or whether Renard mixed things up and was vague on purpose, but it seemed that two or three times a year Renard would take Peg and his burros and go to some far-off settlement, but never the same one in succession. He left Peg in camp while he'd go to a storekeeper and barter his nuggets, pretending he didn't have many and lie, of course, about where he'd picked them up.

Sometimes he would buy whatever he thought would please Peg, just like any fond father. Once he had got a lot of story books, as he called them, meaning novels, from a sick Eastern man out for his health; and later he had thrown most of them into the fire because she liked to read too well. Another time he had got nice clothes, girl-sized, from a dressmaker.

Careful as he was, he knew he was talked about in the towns and that sometimes men tried to follow him. Red guessed that trailers who sniffed too close were bush-whacked, and he hadn't any doubt now that the girl meant what she said today when she stopped him on the trail.

Renard was Indian-cunning and cruel; and very much wrought up because today was the first time, so far as he knew, that anybody had come close to his mine; and why he was so sure Red and the others were Kellems he didn't say, but he was sure.

He was sure too that the riders he had seen couldn't possibly find the way to the cabin before tomorrow, then only if they followed the stream, which they couldn't in the dark, he said; and, besides, they didn't know the lay of the land.

He, in a way, acted relieved to talk as freely as he did, probably because he had been the same as tongue-tied for so long, with nobody but the girl who seemed at times to rile old memories, even if she didn't resemble her mother; but even now he wasn't pleasant toward Red. It was as if, having talked, he wished he hadn't.

THEY sat down to coffee, baked beans and deer meat stew. Renard kept his hat on and hunched over as he ate glumly, rapidly, shoveling in mouthfuls through the beard, and gulping a quart, or nearly that, of coffee. Red was wolf-hungry and ate like it, but the girl was finical and sullen, scarcely tasting a thing, and she looked at no one, but got up and down in silence for more coffee and beans.

Renard left the table abruptly, took his rifle and went out.

Red ate on in silence, head down, and

when he raised his eyes the girl was staring at him. He asked, low-voiced, not knowing how close her father's ears might be, "Why d you put that about gold in my letter?"

Her lips scarcely moved as she told him tonelessly, "You're the same as dead right now!"

"Can he hear us, maybe?"

"Maybe." Just that, and eyed Red searchingly. After a time she asked, "So what are you going to do?"

"Eat some more beans." He pushed at his empty plate.

She looked at the plate, looked at him, then got up and filled the plate from the pot at the fireplace.

When she sat down again she said, "No, he ain't listenin'. I know where he's settin'. Halfway up the bluff, where he can listen to the men that try to come down the canyon. He'll be there most of the night. Maybe all night. Often of late he does, he's that suspicious. You can't get away now. You never can! He's told you about the mine, so he won't let you live to tell somebody else! He's killed men before you! That's why he knows they're Kellems comin'!"

Red chewed and listened.

"Last trip two Kellems cornered us in camp outside the town down in Verde Valley. They said they had to be told where the nuggets come from or they'd kill us. So they tagged along. One," she said with no more feeling than if talking of coyotes, "got shot and the other got away, bad hurt. But he stayed in the saddle as far as I could see. He's been crazy-mean ever since." "He" meant her father. "I," she explained with no change of tone, "put that in your letter because he's gold-mad, and saying you wouldn't touch gold was one thing, and about the only thing, to help you any!"

Then her dark eyes brightened with a kind of anger, her lips moved fast and the words had a bitter wasp-like hum. "I hope the Kellems come and kill him! And take me away—I don't care where! It's been bad and now is worse, and some day he'll kill even me 'cause can I help it if I am a woman! And I tell you he'll kill you if you don't him!"

The worst of it was that Red now more than half believed her, and he gazed moodily into the dimmed coals of the fireplace; and she saw, or sensed, his belief and leaned nearer, whispering, "And only you and me would know about the mine—or—or ain't I pretty enough?"

II

RED spread his bedroll outside by a corner of the cabin and didn't sleep. He hadn't cleared a space and the ground was rock-lumpy; but if he'd had pine needles under him he would still have been wakeful, and not from the cold either, though the night-chill went through his coat and even the blanket he huddled under in sitting up. He smoked cigarettes and wished he was the hell out of here for the kind of fear he had was different than any he'd ever known; and, though he thought about the old miner shooting him to keep his gold secret, that wasn't what gave Red uneasy tingles; he was afraid of that girl who had a pull like a rawhide rope, and he believed she was wicked, but it somehow almost didn't seem to matter because he also believed she was maybe in the right about her father, who was crazy. And she was pretty —seemed prettier every time he looked at her.

He had a rifle beside him and it was a .44, and his revolvers were .44s, so all his guns used the same ammunition; and he also had more shells than were in his belt. He had taken his guns and boots off to get between the blankets but put them on again when he sat up and studied about trying to get his horses and make an attempt to ride off. But Renard, wherever he was, would be sure to hear the click of their shod feet and figure Red was wanting to get away because he knew about the mine.

The girl stayed up for a long time before she put out the lantern; then maybe she went to her bunk, or maybe she didn't. *Strange girl!* he thought and wondered at himself for half-liking her, wondered more at the way she could pull the breath out of his mouth, the marrow out of his bones, make his knees weak.

He had been scared in his life. *A pile of times!* he told himself, but never before into such a muddled helpless feeling. Also he told himself, *I don't give a damn about the gold!* but was honest enough, right off, to get around to admitting that he did. He'd

never in his life had more than seven to eight months' wages at one time, except the time he got $2,000 for shooting the train robber that made the mistake of trying to knock Red out of the saddle to get his horse; and all that had sort of slipped through his fingers, with some fun here and a loan there, and bad luck at poker. Of course, he'd often thought how pleasant it would be to have a big ranch, fine cows and horses, and maybe a wife. All of which took money. In thinking of money he had to think of Peg as a wife, which gave him shivers that weren't altogether unpleasant but were partly so.

He sat and smoked and brooded, and heard the night sounds of wind and water, and the small scratchings of animals, that were maybe skunks, without any awareness that he heard them; but the long-drawn scream that went through the trees jerked up his head. He couldn't place where the sound came from but he knew Peg might have been truthful about the cougar-cats, which he had doubted, not having heard one before all the time he had been in the mountains. His horses would be scared and it was better that they were locked up than out on a rope. That was another tally mark in her favor because the ready way she had lied when reading his letter made him wonder at how she could lie.

HE DOZED off some but didn't know how much because when he woke up he felt that he hadn't been asleep at all. His was the cowhand's trick of being wide awake all at once; and the crunch of boots must have opened his eyes for it was still dawn-dark when he stood up and saw Renard's big form coming close.

Renard said, quiet and deliberate, "They camped the night."

He didn't act a bit crazy now and, if he had been awake all night, he didn't seem tired; and it must have been freezing cold up on the bluff without even a coat.

It got lighter quick with the slow graying light of mountain-morning shadows; and the girl, who had got up and dressed without making a sound, came out. The air was cold but she didn't huddle up or shiver, and her eyes looked sleep-swollen, or maybe she had cried quietly in the night. She stared at her father as if to make sure what mood he was in before she smiled a little at Red, but didn't speak.

Red was all set, by his meditations through the night, not to like her, but she looked like the same lureful girl grown prettier. Her hair wasn't up but loose and had a gloss, and Red had worked on the mane and tail of too many horses he was proud of not to know that it took a lot of brushing to make hair shimmer. She was wearing a buckskin suit; it wasn't new or clean and the fringe had been cut off, but it was fine soft buckskin and fitted her like a hand-made glove. She had a towel that was a washed-out flour sack and went down the slope to the stream to wash in the ice-cold water.

Renard looked after her and he said quietly, "It's hard on her, alone like this, and I've got a bad temper. We'll have a cold breakfast. I can make a fire without smoke, but the wood-smell carries far. There's a chance they may miss us. I've made no trails in or out."

He spoke just like any solid careful man, and his eyes were steady and hard but without the crazy gleam. Red wondered how it could be that he was so mean at one time and all right another. As far as Red knew, only whiskey did that to people, and he had a full bottle in his saddle bag in case of snakebite, or something, and thought about bringing it out, but hadn't said anything before Renard went on into the cabin.

Red rolled and roped his bed and laid it beside the cabin where his saddle was, and thought he'd better take the horses down for water. They would be hungry for he hadn't any grain and they hadn't had a chance, like usual, to graze. That was on his mind as he looked toward Peg who seemed to like cold water as much as an otter; and though he had no such love of cold water and soap as all that, it helped to make him think well of the girl.

THERE was a thud right beside him that knocked a piece of bark off the corner of the cabin as the thin report of a gun bounced about with diminishing faintness. He jumped and whirled with a revolver in his hand, and more shots came at him, fast. It wasn't easy to spot where they were coming from, being pretty far off and not sharp, and he wondered at not seeing the smoke.

Then he did see it sifting thinly among the willows a good long way off downstream and beyond the clearing. He didn't do any thinking about it, but just knew the distance was about 200 yards, and no good for a revolver, so he picked up his rifle and made for a sheltering corner of the cabin. At the same time he sort of guessed, again without thinking, that the Kellems—if they were Kellems—had divided and one party was coming upstream, which Renard, for all of his wariness, hadn't suspected. He was glad that the sniper hadn't had a chance to sneak up closer to the cabin, get behind a stump or rock; and from the way the shots were coming he judged that there must be at least two men firing but they weren't in sight.

Renard rushed from the cabin. Red said, "Look out!" and pointed; then from around the corner he saw the girl, who had started to run, go down flat on her face. He thought, *damn such men!*

Renard was crouched, trying to glimpse something to shoot at and hadn't seen the girl fall. She didn't scream but got up and stumbled and fell again. Red said, "I'm going to help her!" and bolted as he was shot at.

Renard then stood up at the cabin's corner and fired, whether he could see anybody or not.

It was about two to three hundred feet to Peg who was getting up again as Red came to her, and she didn't look scared, not in the least, but said angrily, "I fell and hurt my knee!" She stood up, bending over with a hand to the knee, and stared downstream. A bullet struck near and whined off a rock and Red thrust his rifle at her.

"You take this and I'll carry you!"

Peg took the rifle about as if she were going to stand right there and shoot toward the men that were still out of sight; but she didn't shoot. Red caught her up, but he couldn't run now, not over the rough ground, not with her weight in his arms, and upgrade too. He couldn't tell how close bullets were coming but they were coming, and that made him know the men had to be aiming as much at the girl as at him.

HE headed around to the fireplace end of the cabin, out of range, and set Peg down and reached for his rifle. She held to him as if she needed a hold on him to stand, and she let him take the rifle as if not noticing what he did. Her face was staringly close to his when she said, "Kiss me!"

He would have, but Renard had rushed around the corner to see how badly she had been hurt. When she said, "I cracked my knee and can't walk!" he hadn't any sympathy. Red knew from being jolted out of the saddle how badly a cracked knee can hurt.

Renard ordered, "Get in the cabin! That's what it's for! There'll be more down here shootin', anytime now!"

Peg didn't limp much but reached to the side of the cabin, steadingly, as she walked toward the door. The shooting had stopped because the men couldn't see anybody to shoot at, but as Red was heaving his saddle and bedroll inside—he didn't want them carried off by the Kellems—a bullet thudded right into the bedroll. One of the men had angled up from the stream and got in line with the doorway.

Red flung his stuff inside and got on one side of the door. Renard was on the other, looking out and neither of them could see anything.

Red said, "There's two of us, and maybe three of them. So why do we need to hole up?" meaning, let's go out and fight it out!

Then Red wished to the lord he'd never said it, or anything of the kind, for Renard glowered at him with that queer look, something like a cat's eyes has in the dark. "I built it 'cause I knew some day men would come and try to kill me for the gold I've found!"

And that world "gold" seemed just like a powder keg blowing up inside his brain. He glowered some more at Red before shutting the door, which made the cabin dark as a cave, and put the pole across it; then he jerked a bench up to the side of a wall and pulled a loophole plug, peering out. After a time he moved the bench and took out another plug.

Red thought, *Of all the damn-fool ways to make a stand!* He had been brought up and trained to make a fight without thinking how safe he could make himself, but how unsafe he could make the other fellows.

A shaft of light came through the loophole and fell on Peg, who was on a bench by the table with her buckskin skirt pulled high. She rubbed at a skinned knee and didn't look toward him, but her eyes slid

toward her father with a kind of dread. Maybe she knew the signs.

There wasn't any sound of men outside and Red felt pretty helpless: being locked up this way was like being shut up in a kind of trap. His mouth felt a little dry and he thought he'd like a drink, and he asked Peg if there was some water. She looked at him in a strange steady way, putting a finger to her lips as she shook her head and glanced toward her father's back.

Red shrugged a shoulder. *A hell of a note!* he thought, thinking too that it was just like a gold-mad man to go to all this elaborate work of building himself a fort, as if to stand off an army, yet forget to have any water—probably because water was so near and easy to have if he had thought about it in time.

Red put himself at a loophole and peered and saw nothing. He had to stand on a bench to see out and be ready to shoot. He guessed that Renard planned the loopholes high so nobody could sneak up and shoot into the cabin. Red didn't feel that was a bright idea. If there had been enough men inside the cabin to keep watch at each loophole the situation would have been all right, or at least better; but if there were that many men, there would be no need to hole-up at all. As it was, the fellows outside, with stumps and rocks and trees to creep behind, had all the best of it.

What Red thought of in particular was that if the men who sneaked up close couldn't shoot into the cabin, they who were inside couldn't shoot at men who got up close—not even though they brought up brush and bough to start a fire and smoke or burn out the folks in the cabin. He dreaded that.

RENARD might have a lot of cunning but he didn't have much gumption; and, because he knew there wasn't any water, Red's mouth got drier and drier. There weren't any pebbles, so he snipped a button off his shirt and sucked on that.

Renard opened his loopholes and peered from one and another, growing fretful because he didn't see anybody. Angrily, he told Peg to get up and help keep a lookout, and he twisted about to watch as she sullenly, and with a limp, crossed to her bunk and took her rifle from the pegs; then she pulled a short bench, really a kind of four-legged stool, to the wall and stood up. She wasn't nervous but she was sullen, and it made Red hot under the collar to have her father treat the girl like that. Red wasn't sure whether he liked her or not; or rather, he wasn't sure whether or not he ought to like her, but he didn't like the way Renard acted toward her.

A gun banged, not very close, and Renard gave a little jump as he turned on his bench to face toward the loophole. His foot slipped and he fell, and it was so much like he had been hit that Red let go with a yip as he jumped down to give a hand if Renard was hurt.

He wasn't hurt, just mad, and getting to his feet drew back his fist and shouted, "You laughed like you hoped I was shot!"

Red saw he couldn't tell this crazy man anything, at least reasoningly, but he said, "You act like a damn' fool! Why'd I want you shot when then there'd be more chance to have my own hide nailed to the door!"

Renard was big and now hunched over, glowering; his eyes again had the queer not-right gleam. Red didn't back up but stood almost toe to toe and he said, "I think you've played hell, holin' up like this! The Kellems—if that's who they are—split in two, and two or three of 'em, coming upstream, have trapped us here and are waitin' for the others to come! All they've got to do now is set out there behind the rocks and keep a bead on the door. And we can't get out! There's not a drop of water in this place, and won't be any; and, if they don't burn us out after dark—when they can sneak up close with brush and stuff—we are going to be just like rats in a trap for as long as they want us to be!"

Red, of course, didn't see how Peg was staring at him. She seemed amazed and kind of halfway proud, as if she had never imagined anybody would talk back to her father, and was wonderingly pleased.

FOR a long minute or two Renard glared murderously, probably because he wasn't altogether sane and was used to having his own way; but what Red had said about no water got through to what sense he had left, and stunned him about like a blow with a rock. He turned and walked over to the big wooden bucket by the fireplace and stooped,

peering. The bottom was a little more than moist and that was all. Then he shook the coffee pot and it was empty, too.

Red had got up on the bench from which Renard slipped. This was near the door and faced toward the bluff, and he saw a man not a hundred yards off move from one rock to another in a kind of shadow-swift way, too fast to be shot at.

Again Red felt mad over the way the "fort" had been planned. To get any kind of aim at all he would have to poke his rifle out and keep his hand under the barrel because a bullet won't go true if the barrel rests directly on something solid. And the men out there, without being seen themselves, could see the rifle sticking out and have a perfect target to shoot at.

And all the time Red stood there, Renard was shouting at the girl because there wasn't any water. She had known the Kellems were coming—and she damn' well knew why!—and ought to have seen to it that water was stored. Just like her no-good mother, he said, who never thought of anything but prettying up! That, and getting money out of men! He had gold, he said, pounds and pounds of gold right here in this cabin, but no water! His voice got louder and louder as he talked, and he couldn't say "Gold!" without showing that he was out of his senses.

Peg didn't say a word back. She continued to look out of the loophole until she turned excitedly with, "I've just seen three of them!"

Renard at once pushed her aside and got up to look out, and Red was dragging the bench he'd been standing on over to that side of the wall, when Peg came close and shook her head and again put her finger to her lips; and he understood that she had just said that to shut up her father, and it did.

She was good at lying.

There wasn't anything of the coward about Renard. He laid his rifle so that the muzzle showed and stood right behind it, watching; and if there had been any men fairly close out there they could have killed him.

That helped Red think there weren't many men—not enough to surround the cabin; and he guessed that they were keeping a good watch on the door-side of the cabin, knowing nobody could get out of the trap.

The morning dragged itself out, noon came, and none of them had eaten a bite. Red's mouth was dry as burnt cotton, but he didn't say anything about water, and the girl didn't either. Renard drained what little there was in the bottom of the bucket and started in on her again, but shut up when a voice right up outside the cabin called, "Renard!"

It was a surprise, the man being close; though Red had foreseen how somebody could get up to the cabin, he hadn't expected anybody to try until after dark. Renard walked slowly, on tiptoes, over to that side of the cabin, just as stealthily as if slipping up on the fellow, and didn't say a word. The man outside said bitterly, and with a mean kind of glee too, "I swore I'd hunt you down, you and that damned girl! I'm Jim Blake!"

Renard turned right around and glared at Peg, and she sucked in her breath, looking scared. Red felt he ought to keep a lookout the best he could against whatever the other men out there might be up to, yet for a long minute he didn't take his eyes off Peg because he wondered so. It wasn't like what he had seen of her to be scared. She had told Red that she hadn't spoken to a "living soul" for some years, yet now he heard Jim Blake call her names and say, "She fooled us with her soft talk! Killed Bill and I've still got her bullet in my back!"

His tone changed and he spoke directly to Peg, with, "I'm goin' to get you, you ornery little skirt if it takes me to my dyin' day!"

Then, even if she had been scared for a minute, Peg let go, her voice up and taunting, "Thought yourself so good-lookin' no woman but would fall in love! Yes, I fooled you! It was easy done! I knew soon as you found the mine you'd have killed my father—"

Jim Blake broke in with what sounded like, "You said you wanted him killed!"

Peg shouted right back, "I'd say anything to make a fool out of you! That's how I made you trust me till I got the chance to shoot! And you run—run like the scairt dog you are!"

Red had an idea and went up close to her and said, quick and low, "Keep talkin'!" as

he jerked his hunting knife from its sheath. Then he got down on his knees about where he judged Jim Blake would be on the other side and, laying his rifle down, began to dig at the mud-mortar between two logs at what would be about belly high to a man. The mud was hard and dry and easy to break out, and he tried to be careful, even if working fast for as soon as any fell on the other side Blake would know what was coming.

Peg kept talking all right. She reminded Blake how he and the man called Bill had come into camp and threatened her and her father until they promised to show where the mine was, and had taken all their guns away from them. "I had to fool you," she said, "any way I could so as to get hold of a rifle!"

Then she went on to say, just as if it were true, that there were other miners close by who would hear the shooting and move in on the outlaws. How she could lie was a wonder to hear.

Red felt some of the clay drop on the outside from the push of his knife and, if Jim Blake noticed, he would know what it meant; but there wasn't any sound, and Red stooped down to squint through the crack, trying to see; and as he peered, one-eyed, a shadow right close blocked his vision and red rocked to one side as a rifle barrel was stabbed into the chink and fired, not merely once but again and again. Jim Blake moved the butt of the gun this way and that so as to rake the cabin. Renard was fairly safe by having stepped back up on the bench to watch outside and try to get a shot at Blake; and Red was safe because he stood close against the wall alongside where the rifle was being fired, but Peg was where she could be hit until she jumped upon the table and she called angrily, "Shoot back at him!"

The cabin was nearly fog-thick with powder smoke but Red could glimpse her standing there, and though he barely saw her for only a second, the way she looked and her unafraidness stayed with him. He didn't think about her then, or of how, with woman-cuteness, she must have tricked Jim Blake on the trail.

Without thinking, Red heaved up his leg and struck the gun's muzzle as hard as he could with the bottom of his foot, and the crotch of the boot heel gave a lot of force and jammed the barrel in the chink momentarily, which was long enough for him to pull a revolver and, placing it alongside the rifle barrel, to shoot.

Whether he was hit or not, Blake yelped and quit struggling to jerk the gun free. Maybe he just lay down close to the cabin and was safe enough while waiting for a chance to slip away, or maybe he crawled to an end of the cabin and made off without Renard catching sight of him.

Red jumped to the fireplace and got the hatchet that was there and came back and beat down on the muzzle end of the rifle barrel enough to bend it a little, and that ruined the rifle. The blows also widened the chink. Then Red drove the rifle out and tossed the hatchet back toward the fireplace.

"One less gun they've got!" he said, and could hardly say it because his mouth was dry, and he could taste the powder in the smoke that filled the cabin.

Renard didn't say anything. He had looked on and understood, and now was going from loophole to loophole, irritably. Peg simply sat down on the table, let her legs dangle, rubbed at the skinned knee, and presently she asked, "You hungry?"

"A little, maybe," Red answered.

"Cold beans left."

"I think I will, a bite or two."

Beans would be moist, and anything moist would taste good. He took the button from under his tongue and put it in his shirt pocket. Peg scooped up beans on a tin plate and brought it to the table. He had started to eat, standing up, when gunfire began to crackle. The shooting was from the front of the cabin, or at least the side the door was on. Red put down the plate of beans and yanked a bench across the room to stand on. There were two loopholes on this side. Renard was at the other and shooting, too.

Red could see smoke puffs blossom up among the rocks a hundred yards or so uphill, but that was all he could see. The men up there weren't exposing themselves though they kept shooting pretty fast. He guessed there were no more than four or five men, but they kept firing and weren't very accurate, which they ought to have been with rifles at that distance. Anyhow, though bullets thumped against the cabin, not a slug came through his loophole; and he fired now and then when he thought he had a

glimpse of somebody; but Renard was shooting like he wanted to waste his ammunition.

Peg got up on the bench beside Red and she wouldn't get down when he said to; but she crowded him aside and looked through, and she shot a couple of times. He told her, "You're just making a noise!"

She snapped back, low and quick, "If I don't, he'll say I ain't trying!" and didn't need to stab a thumb toward her father to show what she meant.

Red said, "Get away from here!" and gave a shove.

She got down and he peered out and couldn't see a man or horse, but he could see where some of the men were doing their firing; so Red calculated the best he could on what a ricochet might do and try one or two, but as nearly as he could judge without luck.

Then all at once Red wondered what the devil? Every man up there, or at least four or five, began shooting like they too were trying to get rid of ammunition; and he knew some of them were firing revolvers, and nobody was aiming good. That was such an unintelligent way to shoot that he drew back his rifle and peered to see what the trick was.

When a gun went off right behind him in the cabin, or so it seemed, he whirled about so quick that he lost his balance on the narrow bench and jumped to keep from falling; and because he had looked behind him he first saw Peg standing there with the rifle butt against her waist and the muzzle was up, and smoke boiled over her head; then Renard, with a kind of half-turn as if trying to see behind him, toppled backward from where he was standing and fell like he had been thrown. He was a powerful man, and the jar was like when a hammer-struck steer drops.

Red's heart jumped right up into his throat and stuck. He couldn't swallow it down and his mouth was parched, so he couldn't have said anything if he had known what to say; and after staring at her and feeling sick at his stomach, he went over sort of helplessly and peered at Renard. He was not dead, but now about the same as if he were for the bullet had gone into his back, and what breath was left in him after being shot had been knocked out by the fall. He tried suffocatingly to get his breath and groaned like some big hurt animal; and the first word he gasped was, "Water!"

All Red could do was shake his head. There wasn't any; not a drop. Peg came up close and kneeled down, but Renard struck at her with sweep of arm. She fell over backwards and his eyes again looked like sulphur burned in them; and, almost too quick for Red to grab his hand and twist, Renard pulled his revolver and would have shot her. Peg got up and backed away, staringly. "I never!" she said. "I never done it!"

Red a little more than halfway felt she needed shooting, but he couldn't see it done; and as bad-hurt as Renard was, Red had a hard tussle to take the revolver from him, though the man couldn't even sit up. As soon as Red jerked away the revolver, Renard drew his knife and tried to get up, but was too hurt. He could hardly talk because his mouth was so dry, and he was near dead, too, but he did talk, and the way he worked his mouth was like biting and chewing on words, and the words were mostly curses. He threw the knife at Peg, but it was a wild throw and she didn't move to dodge it. Renard had got it into his head that Red wanted him killed, too, and, being just as crazy as could be, and dying, there wasn't a thing to be said back to him that would do any good.

The nearest to water, or medicine, was the bottle of whiskey in Red's saddle-bag, and when he went over to get it he became aware for the first time that the shooting outside had stopped and some voices were yelling, not very excitedly but as if sort of pleased. He found his corkscrew and pulled the cork, then went to the fireplace for a cup and poured in some whiskey. When offered, Renard snatched it out of Red's hand then right off threw the cup and whiskey at him.

It struck Red about waist high and splashed, and he didn't really care except he wished Renard wouldn't die thinking that he had been in with the girl to shoot him; but that is what Renard did think, and his words weren't very clear, or clear at all, he had to mouth them so; but Red understood enough to know that Renard cursed his daughter for being like her mother, and he cursed Red for thinking he would have the

gold. Renard hoped the Kellems would kill them both.

The girl didn't say a word; she just stood stiff and frozen as she eyed her father, and looked now as if she hated him more than ever in her life.

IT WAS pretty awful. Even after Renard quit trying to thrash about and lay back and didn't talk, his breath was loud and hoarse and labored, like he was still trying to curse them and couldn't shape the words. Red thought, *I've still got to keep fighting!* but he continued to stand motionless and look at the dying man. He had seen men die from gunshot wounds, and suffer too, but this dragged harder on his feelings than ever before; and when he looked toward the girl, her eyes were like two fixed spots in her head as she kept staring at Renard.

He went back to his saddle-bag and pulled the loosened cork and took a couple of swallows, and they didn't taste good but cut the cotton-like phlegm in his mouth. Then he got back on the bench and he saw two men standing close together and not looking toward the cabin—just like they thought they were in shelter when they weren't. He raised the rifle, rested it on the heel of his palm, took a slow aim because he wanted to be sure. Before he fired, another gun banged and the man he was aiming at dropped.

He looked around and saw Peg on the bench where her father had been. She had fired quick—and hit. A minute later she looked toward Red and said, matter-of-factly, "That's one less for us to fix!"

Red didn't say anything then. He stepped off the bench and sat down on it and looked at Renard, who wasn't breathing at all now. He was dead. Red studied a little, then looked up and said, "How the hell could you do a thing like that?"

Peg asked from where she was standing on the bench, "Like what?"

Red pointed toward her father.

She stepped down and looked hard at Red and he looked hard at her, and in a kind of empty-sounding voice she asked, "You think that of me?"

Red said, "I damn' near seen you do it!"

"I never!" There wasn't any energy in her denial. "Somebody shot right through the loophole over my head just as I was stooping down to look through that chink you made!"

Red shook his head at her. "Take a man ten feet tall! He'd have shot at me, too. You've talked about me killin' him, and I wouldn't—so you did!"

Again she was stiff, as if frozen, and stared at him like she wasn't going to say anything, but she did. "Yes. Maybe I am mean and wicked because I wished he was dead and thought I didn't care how! But now I do. I didn't shoot him. I tell you I didn't! I hated him more than half the time. I won't go back on that! I wanted to get away anyhow I could! When you are mad and hurt, you feel things in a way that's not like when you ain't!"

Red remembered that she must have had a chance to kill her father on the trail when she had made up to Jim Blake so as to get hold of a gun; but he didn't bring that up now.

He thought, *You are good as the devil hisself at lying!* but he said, "Now we are in a worse pickle. Your father was a good fighter!"

She came close and, as if what Red accused her of had just struck her with full force, asked with hurt quietness, "You believe I shot him?"

"I sure do!"

Peg said, "Oh!" with a catch in her breath and Red put it down to play-acting. Then she said, "And I liked you!" as if she didn't now and never would again. Red didn't feel like talking. His mouth was too dry. He thought, *I purt' near liked you more than I ought!* She said, "Now I hate you and always will!" He thought, *Maybe that's her warning that she'll shoot me, too!* But it didn't upset him any and he said back to her, "Maybe you think you're so pretty the Kellems will be good to you if you shoot me and walk out on them with your hands up!"

She slapped him and slapped hard, and so quick that he didn't see her hand coming in time to dodge. Her voice was furious: "I hope they kill you!"

He didn't get up or strike back or anything, didn't even rub the sting she left on his face. She was mad and he was tired, and quarreling wouldn't help. He already knew what he was going to do after dark came.

But his not moving or talking back made

Peg angrier. "I hate you!" she said. "I never hated anybody like I hate you!"

How she could keep on talking when she hadn't had any water either, he didn't know. His mouth felt swollen, he was hungry and tired. She was a girl, and hadn't had water or eaten, but she had enough energy to quarrel; and he thought—*Maybe she is kind of crazy, too!* "Crazy" seemed about the only thing to explain the inexplicable.

He got up and went to the table and put some of the beans in his mouth, but his jaws ached to chew, so he went to the fireplace to spit them out; and when he turned around Peg was watching him just about as if she had it in mind to take a shot at his back.

He said, "All right, go ahead if you want!"

"Ahead—what?"

"Shoot!"

"I would if I wanted!"

Red's nerves were raw, too. "I guess you would me, too, only you are scared you aren't pretty enough for Jim Blake to forgive you! You shot him in the back, too!"

Again Peg made a sound like he had struck her and caught her breath; then she said, "I'll just show you! Show you what the Kellems want!" She laid her rifle on the table and went to the fireplace and clawed out a thin slab and lifted a half-gallon can that had rusted. It was heavy and she brought it to him.

"Gold!" she said. "And there is more than this!"

RED was interested, of course, but he didn't let on. He didn't know whether or not it really was gold as he fingered some rocks that had an almost solid rust color. "This," he said, "looks mostly like what is called fools' gold. Just copper and mica."

What she had hoped would happen when he saw the gold, Red didn't know; but now she called him a fool, and might have gone on till she said something revealing, but a voice was yelling for Renard.

Peg got on a bench and shouted, "What'd you want?"

"Renard! Want to tell him something!"

Right off she said, "He's eating supper. What you want?"

The man yelled, "If you want to stay alive, all you come out with your hands up!"

And she answered, "If you all want to stay alive, you'd better hit the trail! We've got friends comin'!"

After that she wouldn't say anything more though the man kept shouting; and Red went peering from one loophole after another, trying to see what tricks they might be up to while the man held her attention; and he felt more than ever like a rat in a trap. It was now late in the afternoon and would soon be dark.

When the man outside shut up, Red went to Renard. It wasn't right to leave him lying out on the dirt floor of the cabin. The body was heavy, but he raised it and started toward a bunk with Renard's feet dragging. Peg came and lifted the feet, helping, and tears ran out of her eyes though she didn't sob. She watched him spread a blanket over her father, then turned away and sat down with her hands to her face.

III

ALL Red could find to dig with was the hatchet and he set to work chopping out the ground close to the wall where he had forced the chink and ruined Jim Blake's rifle, and he used the water bucket to scoop up what he chopped and dump the earth to one side. Every few minutes he stopped and went from one loophole to another, having a look, and now and then fired just to show that watch was being kept. When he saw smoke going up behind the shelter of rocks near the foot of the bluff he knew the men were cooking supper.

Peg watched him at his digging and didn't ask questions. He hurried as hard as he could because it would soon be dark and it wouldn't do to have a lantern burning in the cabin. That would give the fellows out there a big advantage. This was dirty work and he was tired and grew thirstier. He wondered if ever again he would buy a drink of whiskey when he could have water.

Peg came over and stood where he was down on his knees, and her eyes were swollen from crying. She asked, "You goin' to run away?"

Red rocked back, not rising, to look at her. He wet his dry lips with a dry tongue. "I am not! I'm goin' to get out there and lay for 'em at sun-up!"

He wasn't sweating much—there wasn't water enough in him for that—but his skin

was a little damp and dust covered his face, and his eyes had a haggard bright look, like a kind of angered fever. "They'll be bunched up close, keepin' watch on the door. So to try to sneak out that way would be about like asking to be shot at, point-blank!"

Peg said with whispering huskiness, "There are four or five of them!"

"They won't know how many there is of me when I open up! The man that shoots first has a big edge when he's as mad as I'll be!"

"Will you take me?"

"No. I'll bring you some water if I don't drink the whole damn' river dry first, like I feel I might! You're safe in here."

She said, "You dig and I'll help!" and got down on her knees and scooped up some dirt in her hands.

"It'll be a bigger help if you sort of keep a lookout so they can't sneak up."

Her voice was bitter with, "For that man that's ten feet tall!"

Red didn't explain that they could bring up a log or something to stand on. If she wanted to stick to the story that a man had shot through the loophole over her head, he couldn't argue. He went on chopping.

She waited a little while, then asked, "Will you take me with you to town?"

"If you want."

Another long pause as he chopped. Then, "Will you tell that I shot my father?"

He didn't answer right off. He wasn't going to say that he wouldn't tell, ever, yet he didn't want to tell that about her though maybe he ought.

"I'll never say I seen you do it."

"But you think I did?"

"What'd you think if you was me?"

Her voice hummed angrily though she said, "I'd know you couldn't do a thing like that—no matter what I saw!"

She walked away and did go from one loophole to another, and now and then she shot, just as he had done. Somebody out there began to shout tauntingly: "Keep it up! Waste your ammunition!"

Red, always against his will, had dug a lot of postholes, sometimes for fences but more often for corrals, and he didn't like that kind of work—or this—but it was the only way out of the rat trap.

Renard had laid rocks for a kind of foundation; and when at last Red tugged out a good-sized rock, he was pleased because the rock displaced a lot of dirt that he didn't have to dig.

It was dark in the cabin before he had enough of a hole to crawl through. The light of the sheltered fire where the men had cooked supper and meant to keep themselves warm through the night was reflected against the bluff, and Peg watched for shadows to shoot at and didn't see many, but now and then she fired anyhow.

Red had to admire the way she didn't whimper and hadn't complained about anything. Danger didn't bother her, and she didn't once mention the lack of water; but each time his feeling grew kindlier toward her, he yanked himself up in the chilled remembrance that she had urged him to shoot Renard, take her and the gold.

It was dead dark in the cabin when he called softly, "All done!"

Peg didn't answer but he heard the light step of her moccasined feet and knew that she had stopped near him. He said, "Give me something to bring you some water."

Still she didn't say anything but he heard her step away again as if she groped slowly, then there was the dull rattle of something loose and heavy being poured on the ground. She came back to him and said, "Here." He moved his hand about until he touched the can she held out. Right off he knew it was the half-gallon can that had been nearly full of gold. There were other empty cans in the cabin, but she had taken the first she could reach. After all, the gold—if it were gold—was as safe on the floor as in the can, but it made him feel funny that gold had been poured out so she could have water.

He was glad it was a rusty can because anything with a shine might attract attention. Red pushed it up outside the hole, then did the same with his rifle, and scrouged down on his belly to crawl through and out.

When he got through he lay motionless and looked all about. The night wind was overhead with its everlasting *shuash* as it moved the upper branches of trees, and now he could clearly hear the stream talking to itself; and the three hundred feet he must crawl seemed miles.

He warned himself, *Don't you over-*

drink! He'd had experience in the desert of being long without water, and unwisely gulping too much when he got to a mudhole. For all he knew, the outlaws might have watchers staked out, so he lay quiet for a long time. And he could hear Peg trying not to sob. It was hard to understand why a girl like her cried so much. Maybe she was sorry for what she had done.

Red was too tired to feel jumpy but not to be cautious. He took each revolver from its holster and shook or wiped it to make sure it wasn't clogged by dirt that could have gathered when he crawled out. He moved the can. It tinked faintly. Sound would carry like a tolled bell through the night-quietness. He wadded his hat into the can and so deadened its emptiness.

After crawling a few inches he again lay still and, when satisfied that he wasn't being watched, he moved on. The ground was lumpy with weathered rocks, many partly buried in the earth. Beyond the cabin's shadow there was starlight in the open space, and this was studded with stumps. He made for the nearest, snaking along with head-up, listening pauses, like a lizard. It was slow going because he was bringing his rifle, too.

When he got in under the trees by the stream he stood up and put each step down as carefully as if sneaking up on a sleeping bear so as not to break any dried sticks. When he felt one he pushed it aside.

He made his way to the water and washed out his mouth, swallowing a little. The water was ice cold and didn't taste good, like he had thought it would. Nevertheless, he wanted to gulp as much as he could hold. He washed his face, taking little sips, holding the water in his mouth before swallowing.

He had been as thirsty lots of times, but never before when water was as cold as this. The night air was cold, too. He wished that he didn't have to crawl back up to the cabin.

Red filled the can about half-full and walked again among the trees on the edge of the cleared space and, feeling safer than when he came, didn't use quite as much caution though he wasn't careless. He hated like the devil to get down and crawl with the half-filled can of water, but he did, setting it out ahead of him and making sure that it wouldn't tip over, then edging up and moving the can again.

He hugged stumps when he could and was behind one when he thought he heard a noise, or a kind of movement, and he lay still, listening. It might have been a small animal—or imagination. He couldn't tell, and wasn't in a hurry, figuring he had all night. When he felt satisfied and raised up on an elbow to inch forward, a rifle fired, then again. The flame spurt was from the cabin and seemed to be straight at him.

Damn that girl! he thought, then right off changed to *Bless her heart!* because not thirty feet dead ahead of him a man went into the air like a shot buck and dropped. Then Red heard a voice quite a ways off call, "They got Sam!"

Somebody answered from farther off, "Damn' fool to go out there!"

The first man said, "He thought he saw something movin' !"

For a long time Red lay like dead too. The watchers, if they were watching, had all the best of it, being already in place while he had to move. Then he heard the gun banging again but couldn't see any flashes, so he guessed that Peg had opened fire from the front of the cabin to draw the men's attention. She would shoot once or twice and stop, then shoot again maybe a couple of times. Likely, she paused to poke shells into the magazine so it would stay about full in case she needed all the bullets.

Red began to move as fast as he could crawl carefully and thought it was pretty smart of her to keep shooting; and, somehow, that caused him to think of how the outlaws had been banging fast and apparently without any purpose just at the time Renard was shot—which made him sort of choke up with wonder if they had played a trick, and the girl got the blame.

But a man ten feet tall? Of course not. But maybe one of the outlaws had sneaked up with something to stand on, then stood up, fired at the first figure he saw and jumped down. *Could be!* Whatever it was the man had stood on must still be there. There would be no point in taking it away. *I am sure going to look!* He was now so hopeful that he already felt bad because he had suspected Peg of shooting her father.

He reached the cabin without having sloshed out any of the water; and, getting to

the hole, called out. She came near and he said, "Reach down and feel around for the can. Water! Don't drink too much all at once." It was blind dark and he felt her hand touch his arm then take the can.

"Thanks for gettin' that fellow that was waiting for me!"

No reply. He could hear her greedily sipping water.

He said, "I reckon them that stay alive don't care how many of the others are killed! Think there'll be that much more gold for them!"

Peg said, "This is good!"

"You can go to sleep if you want. I'll be close by till sun-up."

"Sleep?" Her voice was sharp and scornful. "I have to worry that you don't get hurt when I hate you! *Hate*—do you understand?"

Red thought he understood and said, "Yes'am," mildly because he didn't blame her for how she felt. She had saved his bacon by keeping careful watch over him; and now he almost said that he was sorry for what he had thought of her, but she didn't sound in a mood to be pleased by an apology, so he moved away.

Renard had been shot from this side of the cabin. Red wanted to find what a man could have stood on to be high enough to have fired through one of the loopholes. No man was tall enough to do it without standing on something.

Red went from one corner to the other and didn't find a thing. He had been eagerly sure that he would find a chunk or rock. He wanted to like that girl; or rather, he did like her, and was now more certain than ever that he oughtn't. If she hadn't shot her father, then it had to be a man ten feet tall!

Now he was chilled by more than the night air, which had a slow hard bite and he was without even his coat. *Whatever had to be done, has to be done!* he explained to himself and set out to work his way clear around behind where the campfire was. He wanted to be there when daylight came.

IT WAS hard on his eyes to keep straining through shadows and into darkness, and he had to be careful that his rifle didn't click on a rock or twigs crackle under him. There was relief when the night wind blew at times more gustily and clashed upper branches. As he made his way beyond the edge of the clearing and began the circle to get up behind the campfire, he thought of this and that, and of how the outlaws would have seen his horses—and intend to steal them. If any of the outlaws got away, then he couldn't ride into Verde on his black horse because the horse and brand would be remembered, and that would spoil the job he was supposed to do for Old Tom Watson.

He thought of the gold too; and of course his thoughts went round and round the girl. *She sure shot him!* She didn't mind shooting fellows—as the outlaw, Jim Blake, with her bullet in his back, had told. Red could clear her of any wrong in that. *He needed shooting!* But he had to remember how she could lie, just as naturally as breathing. And she had put it up to him to kill her father, take her and share the gold—which made it bad, very bad, even if she hadn't shot her father her ownself.

He saw where the outlaws had staked out their horses, and counted six but wasn't sure he saw all of them. Two men were down. The girl had got both of them. *A damn good thing I came down the mountain, singing!*

He had no way of judging time because from under the pines he couldn't get a good look at the stars, and he moved slowly, most of the time on his hands and knees. It was cold. He was thirsty again and hungry, too, and that helped put his temper on edge. When he left the pines he had to crawl among the rocks, and at last got around and above the campfire where he could make out a couple of shapes huddled in sleep with their backs to the rock that protected them from the cabin's loopholes.

He felt like cutting down on them here and now. Men that had come up to murder a man and his daughter and steal their gold didn't have any call on a fellow's sense of fair play; but it wasn't his way to shoot sleeping men. And, besides, in this case he knew it would be a fool thing to do. There were more than these two, and the others would hide like quail in brush and have a good chance to pick him off after sun-up.

He scrouged on the ground the best he could, kept his head lifted, held his jaws tight to keep his teeth from chattering and warmed one hand, then the other under his

belly. It was so cold that his feet felt like something that didn't belong to him in his boots.

He cocked up his eyes repeatedly, hoping for daybreak; and now and then he found himself dozing, or half-dozing, and that made him mad.

I'll fix you! he said to himself and moistened a fingertip, stuck it into the tobacco sack, then dabbed at the inside corner of each eye. The tobacco burned like fire and made his eyes water. But he had done it before when he had to stay awake. After the watering stopped his eyes still smarted and he couldn't have gone to sleep if he had tried.

HE JUDGED that he was something less, but not much less, than a hundred yards from the campfire and he reminded himself that his rifle was set for 200 yards, so he must be sure not to aim higher than a man's belly button. When he judged that it was getting along close to dawn he put his right hand up under his left armpit, wanting his trigger finger warm and supple, and now it felt like a stick of ice.

He saw a man come out of shadows and shake the two sleepers into wakefulness, then jab at the coals with a stick and throw on some boughs that put up flames and sent sparks flying. The two men who had been sleeping acted cold and put out their hands to the blaze but turned their faces away because the fire was so hot.

Red thought, *What a chance to pick 'em off!* but he didn't know how many there were altogether, and it was still dark enough for men to scramble aside and hide. He lifted his eyes, hoping for a sun-up streak in the sky and a gun began banging.

He couldn't see the flash but the men about the fire yelped, and one who had been warming his hands went down. The other made a jump for his rifle propped against the rock that sheltered him, but he was smashed by a bullet and rolled over, too, giving the rifle a fling as he dropped.

The man who had awakened them went with a scooting crouch to the ground, trying to shelter himself as he peered toward where the rifle had opened up; then another gun began firing from down the slope a little closer to the cabin. That was one of the outlaws because Red heard him sing out, "Just one, Jim! Edge up the hill a little. I've got him covered!"

Red's thoughts spun in wonder of whether or not the girl had lied in saying there were friends nearby that the shooting would attract. As yet he hadn't pulled a trigger because the man that crouched was on the other side of the blaze and couldn't be seen; but now Red yelled, "One, hell! There's a dozen of us!" and he began firing at where he judged the nearest man had taken cover.

Ricochets screamed and the gunfire echoes bounced in the morning stillness as if a dozen guns were really firing. Then what Red had dreaded happened: the men had been alarmed when it was still dark enough for them to jump and duck without being clearly seen, and he heard the clicking scramble of feet, confused shouts, then the pound of hoofs, fleeing. All the while the rifle that had first begun to shoot kept firing as if it had a magazine that held twice as much as an ordinary gun.

It wasn't quite light when he dimly saw riders go—wide apart and hell-for-leather—across the clearing, heading out downstream and he tried what he could do, but it was about like shooting at bats on the wing. Besides, it was still too dark to see his sights against the background of pines and willows along the stream.

Then out of the quietness that followed the racket he heard the girl call, "Red?" with a lift in her voice like she was excited and pleased, and she was up on the slope under the bluff, too. It hit him all of a sudden that Peg had crawled from the cabin and worked her way, in the opposite direction from the way he had come, to where she had a view of the campfire and had opened up on the men by the fire.

"You played the devil, you have! Why didn't you wait!"

"Wait?" There was anger in the word. Then, "I thought you'd sneaked off and that I had to fight my own way out!" she called back with edged spite and was hurt because he blamed her when he ought to have praised.

Red's feelings were all messed up. He really oughtn't have spoken as he did. It had been brave of her to crawl out and lie in the cold and wait for the chance that the built-up fire gave her; but he wasn't going to

say so, not after how she had snapped back about thinking he had sneaked off.

He said, "You be careful and stay back. The fellows you hit may not be dead! Snakes bite after their backs are broke!"

So they waited, still wide apart, not saying anything as the sky lightened; and presently she called, "Red, I'm froze!"

"Wait!" he said.

Then he began to make his way down to where the campfire's blaze had burned out, leaving the small flicker and red glow of the heavier wood. He couldn't see well enough to be sure until he was pretty close, then found both men dead.

That girl can shoot! he admitted and looked around and there she was, having come up noiselessly on moccasins, and was carrying two rifles. She had brought her father's out with her, which was why she had been able to shoot so much without reloading.

Peg stood on a rock and stared down at him. There was prettiness in her fierceness, for she was mad now at the way he had talked back to her. She hadn't a hat and her hair was tangled in curls, and the buckskin suit was dirtier than ever and her hands and face were dirty. She held one rifle under her arm and the butt of the other was down at her feet. She said furiously, "I hate you!"

Red sort of cocked his head to one side and studied a little, then he let fly, "Better hate yourself!"

She thought that over about like a bobcat thinks of jumping with claws out and teeth bared, then asked coldly, "You still believe *that* of me?"

He told her, "I wasn't thinking of *that!* But now you've brought it up, I've got to say there's nothing else to think! I looked careful last night to see what a man could've stood on to shoot in over your head at him, and there wasn't a thing! So if I don't ever hear of a Kellem that's ten feet tall, I'm going to keep on believin' it!"

Peg stared as if she couldn't make up her mind what to say; and her voice didn't break at all, but it had a hurt sound when she asked, "Is that a way to talk to me after—" She swung the muzzle of her rifle, vaguely indicating the two dead outlaws—"I laid out in the cold all night just to help *you!*"

He answered back, "Look! They found your mine and two of 'em got away to tell where it is, or come back with friends! You oughtn't have opened up before it was light enough to pick 'em off when they scattered! That's what I'm talkin' about now. If you'd waited for daylight, we'd have had the chance to get them all!"

She studied a long time, looking right at him, and he could see the thoughts going around in her eyes; and she had to believe that what he said was so, but her temper was up, too; and she told him, "I see! You're just afraid *you* won't be able to jump my mine! Somebody else may do it before you get the chance! That's the only reason you didn't want anybody to get away!"

Red was so mad he didn't say anything back; but she said, "Let me tell you something! Dad knew snoopers would come sooner or later, and he's got more than a barrel of gold hid away where nobody but me knows where it is! I would have whacked fair and square with you—but I won't now!"

And as if to make sure she had the last word, she whirled, jumped from the rock and went toward the cabin; and in spite of his angered feeling, he felt bad in noticing that she still limped a little from yesterday's hurt knee. He squatted warmingly by the fire long enough to smoke a cigarette and try to think.

He didn't know how to figure her, and decided that maybe he was lucky because now she wasn't trying to make him like her. *That would sure bring a fellow hard luck!* he decided. And even as he told himself, *The hell with the gold!* there was still a kind of ache to have some of it. Then he thought, *She's such a liar I'm liable to wind up by having her say I shot her father in the back my ownself!*

However, he knew that he couldn't or at least wouldn't, ride off and leave her here alone; not even if she wanted to stay, which she didn't, he wouldn't argue against it—though he didn't want her with him. Or so he thought, or tried to think. *Be just like her now to shoot me and say Kellems did it!*

IV

RED poked about, having a curious look at what the outlaws had left. He found four horses and six saddles; the two that had

run had gone bareback with only the piece of rope they had cut loose from. He gave Peg's lies the credit for having scared them off. They had believed her warning that miner-neighbors would come. Otherwise, most likely, the two outlaws that ran would have taken shelter among the trees and rocks and fought it out.

As he led his own horses to water he noticed smoke coming out of the fireplace chimney and supposed that Peg was warming herself. On the way down he went by the man she had shot when Red was crawling back from the river with the can of water. A lanky fellow and bearded with a scar over his forehead. He had thought he was playing smart in waiting for Red to crawl up so close that he couldn't be missed in the darkness. *I'd have been a gone goslin' but for her!*

He wouldn't let his horses have much water at first but staked them out to nibble grass, and wondered what to do with the other horses. He didn't want to be bothered taking them all, but would need one for Peg to ride and another for whatever she wanted to pack out. *Maybe that barrel of gold!* he jeered.

One thing sure, he was going to have to bury Renard. That was *the* tribute a man always gave, if possible, to another man who had gone out putting up a good fight. He could, he hoped, find some place where Renard had dug deep and use that for a grave.

He picked the two horses he thought best, turned the others loose, and looked about for what seemed the best saddle to fit Peg. She called from the cabin door, "You ought to want some breakfast, don't you?"

He hadn't noticed when she went down and fetched water, but the coffee was made; and she had fixed biscuits with a spider for an oven, fried bacon and partly warmed the beans, and had molasses. She didn't talk much, and acted sort of sad or sullen, but waited table for him and he was hungry—hungrier after he began to eat than he had known about. The coffee was good and strong and he almost said so, but kept his mouth shut, too.

She returned from the fireplace, stood near him and asked in not more than a whisper, "What about—?" and she didn't finish, but looked across toward the bunk.

Red said, "He's goin' to have a burial."

She stood motionless, waiting. He put thumb and finger to an earlobe and pulled thoughtfully. "We might as well have a little talk."

Peg sat on the bench across from him, folded her hands in her lap and looked submissive. She could change expression and seem as different as when some girls change dresses.

Red took lots of time with a cigarette and her eyes stayed on his fingers as he rolled it and followed the match flame to the cigarette's tip, then she looked into his face steadily. He had the belief that a girl who lied as readily as she did wouldn't hesitate to accuse him of having fired into Renard's back. *The truth wouldn't be any match against her!*

He said, "I don't know mining law or what claim you've got; but I know men and they grab what they can. I don't know how to tell you what can be done to protect your mine."

"Do we need tell anybody?"

He said, "How so, not? You'll be ridin' one of the Kellem horses and leadin' another when we go in. A girl coming down from the mountains—people are meddlesome curious! And I'll be pestered with questions. I don't lie good. And not talking won't do any good about keeping the mine a secret. The Kellems that got away will tell or come back."

Peg laid her elbows on the table and leaned forward as if to talk about the mine, but she didn't. She said, "You saw how he abused me because of my mother. I don't remember her at all, but I must be like her. He hated me so! Often I wished he was dead, and could have killed him. But not when he did die. You won't believe me?"

Red stonily gave no sign one way or the other.

She leaned closer and her eyes brightened. "I have read stories—until he burned them! —of what the world is like in big cities. If you are rich, life is wonderful, with beautiful dresses and jewels and music. And I want all that! Nobody but us must know about this mine, and there is more than enough to make you rich, too, if you will help me!"

She was standing now to lean across the table and pushed at an unfinished platter of

beans for a place to rest her hands. "I do trust you! I want to like you, but you won't let me—"

Red flushed in a way that would have made him blush if the weather-tan hadn't laid so heavily on his face; and he hated the thought, *She's just fooling you!* but the thought came and was so like a barbed arrow that he couldn't pull it out.

"—because you keep thinking things about me that aren't so, not really!" She was pleading with the softness of a pretty girl, and she was pretty; and her voice had the soft ripple of a little hurrying brook. "I'm only a mountain-girl and I don't know about people, but you do—so, won't you?"

He knew that she was more than a mountain-girl, and she knew it, too, but her appeal had pull. He started to get up with the tin cup for more coffee, but Peg took the cup and filled it at the fireplace and brought it back.

When he asked, "How old are you?" she shook her head with, "I don't know and have wondered, but I think seventeen, and that is full grown, ain't it? And I don't even know my right name for he said often it wasn't 'Renard,' but he wouldn't say what."

"Where were you before he brought you here?"

"Lots of places. When I was littler, he left me with people I didn't know. Paid them, I suppose, but I never stayed long, and I didn't see him often enough to remember what he looked like until he came and brought me here. He'd already found the mine. He said I was too much like my mother to be left loose, and I hope I am like her because—I'll show you!"

She turned and ran to her bunk and threw back the blankets and reached in under the pine needles and brought out a locket that she opened and handed to Red. "That is my mother! He never knew I had it!"

Red looked at the picture of what seemed an elegant woman who smiled without her lips being parted, and she gazed straight at him. The picture wasn't colored so he couldn't tell about the hair, but it looked black; and he didn't know anything about women's clothes, but these seemed rich, and the face appeared only slightly older than Peg's now.

"Isn't she lovely?" Peg asked.

Red nodded, feeling it was about the same as telling Peg that she too was lovely, but he remembered Renard had said this woman tried to kill him.

Red walked away and sat down on a bench not at the table and put his hands on his knees, and his eyes kept going to the blanket-covered body on the bunk. Peg, with mouse-quiet movement, sat beside him and close and didn't say anything but watched his face.

At last he asked, "How far to Verde?"

"I don't know."

"You've been there?"

"No. He left me in a camp in the hills when he went into town."

"You never got scared?"

"Scared—of what?"

He didn't say, but nodded believingly for it seemed she didn't know how to be afraid, except maybe of her father.

"It's already getting late," he said. "We'll have to pack and go. Can you ride good?"

"I used to could. Where I stayed in Kansas, little as I was, they sent me to town and back on a horse." Her hand moved and overlay his, then squeezed gently. "Red, I want to like you, and you me!"

The barbed thought, *She's just fooling you!* was still with him, and he flung off her hand and stood up.

She jumped up, too, mad as a hornet, like a girl usually is if she don't have her way, and stormed, "I'll choke clear to death before I'm ever nice to you again!"

Red went out and prowled about, and he found a place where Renard had dug. Lots of places where he had dug. A powerful man, and tireless. He went back into the cabin and Peg was making things ready to leave.

He asked, "You goin' to help me?"

"Not to keep you from dyin', ever!"

So he went to the bunk and lifted the best he could the heavy body, and, without a word, she came and helped. There wasn't a word said between them, not then nor later when she stood by solemnly and watched him shovel in gravel and earth and rocks; and before he had finished she turned away, walking off slowly with her head down.

Long after Red had saddled up, packed and wanted to start, he sat on his heels and saw the sun climbing toward noontime. Peg

came out and said with no friendliness that she was ready. He went inside and found she didn't know anything about making a pack for horseback, so he shook open her blankets to make a roll. The heaviest article was a canvas sack that wasn't new and was chuck-full. By the feel of it he guessed she had poured in some of the barrelful of gold ore—if it was gold!—that had been concealed underground in the cabin. The weight was just about all he could lift, and the sack was so full he couldn't divide it in a way to balance on a horse.

He asked if she didn't have another sack. She said, "No!" just that, sullenly, and seemed to think that he wanted to divide his share now.

He told her, "This sack won't ride good and it'll sure bust!"

Then it came out, "So you want your share before we start!"

"I don't want anything from you, ever! Except not to hear you open your mouth! Now get me a good pair of your father's pants—and I'll show you!"

She hadn't a hat on but had tied up her hair and covered her head with some colored cloth; and she still wore the buckskin suit, now with a belt and a long knife in a sheath. The belt hadn't any band for cartridges, but

she had laid out her rifle and a sack of shells. After he asked for the pants she studied his face, then without a word went to a shelf and got a brand-new pair of bluejeans.

Red cut thongs from the saddle she was to use and tied the bottoms of the pants' legs tight, then told her to hold up the pants, and he shook half the sack of gold ore into one leg and half into the other. He heaved the ore onto her pack horse then roped on the blanket roll.

After that he shortened the saddle stirrups, helped her up and she had no embarrassment at all about the bunched up skirt that showed her bare legs. She looked about solemnly, as if a little saddened, at leaving the place where she had been lonely and unhappy.

Red took the rope on the outlaw's horse that was being used as a pack animal and headed downstream. He didn't know the lay of the land, but knew the direction he ought to go; and it wasn't easy going. And Peg didn't ride very well, not according to his ideas. There were places where the climb was too steep for riding. When he said, "Pile off," she would dismount, but all during the afternoon she refused to speak.

ALONG toward the end of the day they came to an open space high on the mountain where there was grass and grazing deer bounded off. Red was dead tired from last night and knew that she must be tireder, though she hadn't complained. Besides, the horses needed rest and a chance to feed. It would be a dry camp except for the water in his canteen. He stopped at the edge of the timber, took off the packs and unsaddled, then staked out the horses.

"I'm going to see if I can bring in a deer," he explained, taking a rifle and starting off.

She didn't open her mouth.

He kept just inside the fringe of timber as he moved along. As far as he could see her, she sat motionless on the roll of blankets.

He was quite a ways from camp when he sat down, waiting. A fellow was more likely to get deer by stopping and keeping quiet than by poking about. He hadn't been there long when he heard a shot. His first thought was that the outlaws who escaped that morning had seen and followed them. Only one shot. That could mean they had killed the girl. In which case, they would be laying for him, too.

He had to go back the way he had come, and he tried to hurry but wanted to be careful, too. Anybody waiting in the timber for him had all the best of it. When he came in sight of the camp the horses were grazing

peacefully, but there wasn't any girl. He looked all about, cautiously creeping nearer the camp, and felt shame-foolish at his needless scare when he saw her coming through the knee-deep grass with a spotted fawn over her shoulder. She had shot a deer from where she had been sitting, and most likely picked out the smallest — one she could carry.

He didn't say anything about how he had been alarmed and she didn't say anything at all, but threw off the small deer, sat down and folded her hands, somehow managing not to look at him without seeming to avoid him. It was getting late afternoon and, though he didn't cut boughs for himself, he thought she would like them for a bed. He said, "You fix a fire and I'll pile up some pine needles for you."

Peg might as well have been deaf.

He took his axe and cut a pile of soft boughs. When he had finished there still was no fire.

Without a word he built one, making it small though the night would be cold here on the mountain. He hadn't let her bring any cooking utensils except a large tin cup. He had a skillet for bacon and flapjacks and could make coffee in a print cup, not disliking the taste of grounds. When he wanted biscuits he stuck dough on the end of a stick and held it to the fire. He encased trout in mud and baked it in hot ashes. Deer meat was broiled on coals. Bacon grease was shortening and butter. In that way he didn't have much dishwashing to do.

Tonight he had a couple of good drinks from his bottle of whiskey, then cut off some ribs near the loin of her deer, laid them on the coals, turned them often. When they were done he sprinkled on some salt and ate them one by one, tossing the bones afar, and didn't so much as look toward her. If she wanted to be that way, all right; he'd be that way, too.

If she had let a friendly peep out of her, Red would have gladly fixed her the best supper he could; but be-damned if he was going to try to make up to her.

Neither had slept the night before. Red was glad to spread his bedroll and crawl in, letting her sit there. He couldn't go right off to sleep because he watched Peg. The night chill began to bite hard and she put some of the wood he had chopped on the fire and huddled close. He wondered what the devil had got into her that she was being so stubborn, but he wouldn't speak.

He knew she would have a hard time fixing her blankets and told himself that when she started to fix her bed he'd get up and help. But he went to sleep.

He slept warm and hard—so hard that it was near morning when he awakened. He raised up and stretched his neck. The fire was out and he didn't see Peg, and thought she had made her bed; then he saw the long dark lump of her blanket roll where it had been tossed. She hadn't even tried to make a bed nor keep the fire going.

He got up and stared all about. Now only two horses were staked out in the grass—unless the other two were lying down. Before he had his boots on he saw that only one saddle was where he had placed both.

I must have slept like I'd died! he thought, wondering how she could have brought in a horse and saddled up without his knowing, then the wonder of why she had taken two horses, when she didn't take her bedroll, gave him a puzzle.

As he walked toward the horses he saw where the grass had been pressed down, like two narrow paths side by side. The blue-jeans he had used to make sacks for the gold ore were gone. She had dragged them over the slick grass to where the horse was, and must have carried the saddle, too. How she could have got that load of rocks over the horse's back, he didn't know. But she had. *All I could do to heave it up!*

His was a curious mixture of feeling, being downright ashamed now that he hadn't been nicer to her, and admiring her courage and strength; but he thought what a fool to strike off like that without blankets, and probably no certain knowledge of which way to go. But she had taken her rifle.

As he fixed breakfast he argued that she had to be a better girl than he figured; if she had shot her father, she wouldn't have balked at shooting Red, being so mad at him as she was. *I've got to track her down!* he said, thinking she couldn't have gone far, not in the dark. She would, he guessed uneasily, get lost in the mountains and she wasn't outfitted for camping. Wouldn't starve because she shot so well, but she hadn't had anything to eat. All provisions

taken from the cabin had been put in Red's pack. He didn't think she had even matches.

Presently he got around to convincing himself that she was a thoroughly honest girl, too, because she could have taken his horses and had a packmare that would have followed without being led.

Red staked the packmare in a fresh spot, saddled up and, leaving the camp as it was, set out to trail her. He didn't think he would have to go far; and the trail wasn't hard to follow because she had cut straight across what mountain people called a "meadow"; then she had entered the timber and he wondered how the devil she had gone through in the dark because the branches were low. Perhaps she didn't get into the timber until dawn. The tracks were very fresh.

He kept thinking, *She can't be far now!* and pushed on until the morning was gone. At about high-noon he came to where she had turned down the side of the mountain. She had been here in daylight. The slope was about straight up and down; and Peg had zigzagged in a way that showed she had picked her course. He followed, knowing it would be hard to climb back, and guessed that she had been making for water. He would like some himself, but didn't like going a mile down the mountain side for it —not when he knew he would have to climb back, most of the way on foot.

When he saw the fresh slide that had given way at the drop-off overhanging the river, his first thought was that she had gone over, too. He wouldn't put his horse over that loose and newly loosened earth, so he got off and went around and found that one horse had gone on. But the other had dropped. He felt relief in being sure that the packhorse had fallen, but was still troubled by how she would make out, alone and surely lost.

He gave a loud call and stood listening, but only echoes answered and with a kind of mockery. He thought, *She's got to be down there at the river and is maybe hurt!*

He hung his spurs on the saddle-horn, took the canteen and went afoot, following her horse's tracks, and when he did get to the river he could tell that she had crossed. The print of her moccasins was in the sand where she had stooped to drink; then the horse's tracks went into the shallow river. He called out again, and again the only answer was the lonely sounding echoes. The river would be waist-deep or more, and he wasn't going to wade across and be still afoot.

Evidently she wasn't bad hurt or sick; and evidently, too, she didn't want him to find her. She must have heard his call and if she had wanted him to come she would have fired her rifle.

Now he was a little mad at himself—and her—for having wasted the day. It would be a long haul back to camp, which he couldn't possibly reach by dark. He drank all the water he could hold, filled the canteen, smoked a cigarette, and eyed the trout in the stream's clear water. But he hadn't a line or hook in his pocket.

He started back up the mountain, heading for where he had left his horse and it was steep going, but shorter than the zigzag way he had descended. He paused to rest and, looking toward where he'd have to climb next, he saw the spraddled-out blue-jeans that had broken loose when the horse went tumbling down, and were now lodged against a bush that had struggled-out a foothold for itself on the steep slope.

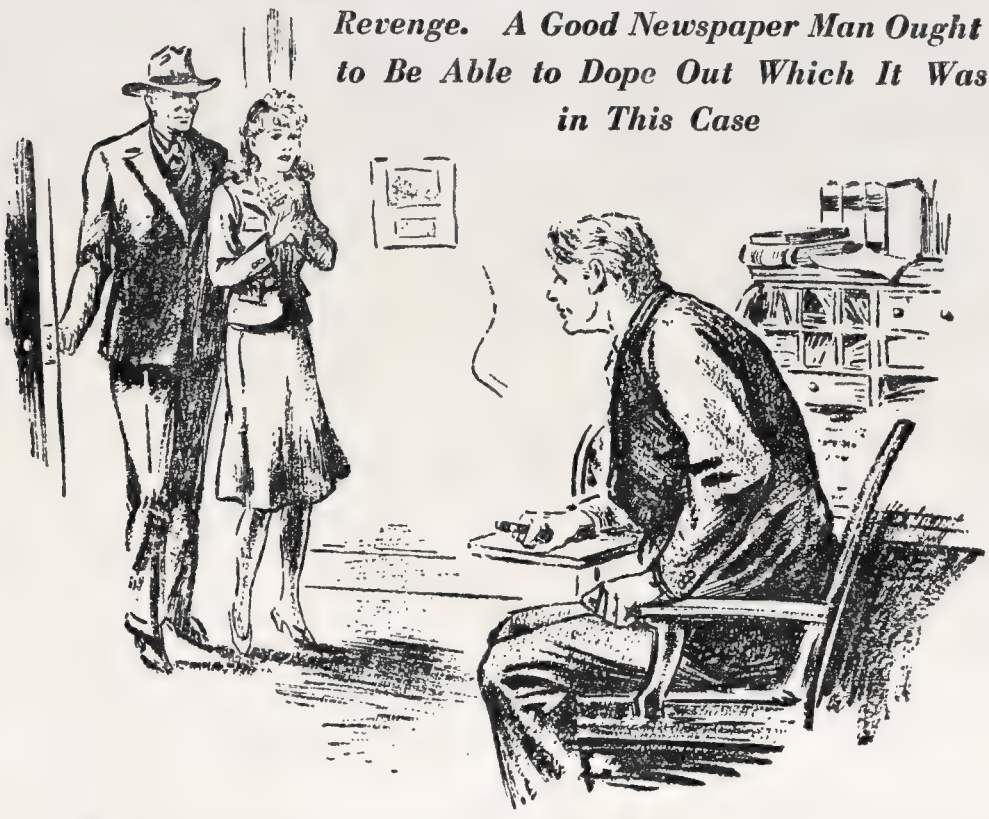
RED stared, then grinned solemnly. That's what the gold had come to. There was Renard's dreams, and the girl's, too, all spraddled out in new jeans that would soon rot and spill the treasure. Right then, Red felt that he wanted nothing to do with the unlucky stuff. It had, he felt, a contagious taint of madness.

He climbed on up and took his knife to cut the thongs he had tied around the pants' legs and grinned bitterly in watching the gold roll out and down, as if scampering into hiding from men's eyes. Then, too late, he wished that he had put some of it into his own pocket—just enough, he thought, so that later somebody who knew could tell him whether or not it was gold. But he wouldn't scramble down and around to pick up any of the rocks.

The hell with 'em!

(Part II in the next SHORT STORIES*)*

There Are Only Three Things People Kill for—Love, Money, Revenge. A Good Newspaper Man Ought to Be Able to Dope Out Which It Was in This Case



MURDER ISN'T EVERYTHING

By KINGSLEY SMITH

SHE came out of the door of the big apartment house in a rush, half-running to the curb where I had parked my convertible. As she climbed in beside me, I had a whiff of a delicate but very definite scent. While I was getting the car under way, I turned for a deliberate look at her flushed, excited face. I was a little excited myself. A male who can gaze on Janet Gordon without some such feeling is either senile or queer; thank heaven, I am neither.

"You're the most beautiful accomplice I've ever had on a murder story," I said.

"Thank you for noticing it, Mr. Dawson," she replied, immodestly.

"Thank you for calling me George from now on—Janet. Two reporters working together can't afford all that formality. Are you nervous, or is that just natural vivacity busting out all over?"

"I'm scared," she confessed. "This is the first important story I've ever been sent on—and working with you, too. Of cou that's a thrill in itself."

"It's nice of you to cut me in," I s... "even though I did get secondary billing. But relax; this job isn't going to be so tough."

I took my right hand off the wheel long enough to pat her, ever so gently, on the shoulder. She didn't seem to mind.

"There are cigarettes in the glove compartment," I said. "Why don't you light one for each of us?"

As she handed me mine, we came to the last arterial stop in West Lakeville and I turned the car onto Highway 13, the main

paved road between Lakeville and Littleton, about 100 miles away. It was a brilliant May morning, and the countryside glistened with spring greenery.

Janet exhaled smoke, and then drew a large breath of unadulterated country air.

"What a day!" she said. "I certainly do admire your choice of weather."

"How old are you?" I asked.

She laughed, and it was a good, throaty, gusty laugh.

"That's the quickest switch from the weather I've ever seen a conversation take," she said. "I am twenty-two years old, five feet, six inches tall, weigh 118 pounds, and have never been turned down for insurance."

"And the way those inches and pounds are distributed," I said, "I don't believe you'd be turned down by John Robert Powers, either."

She took the compliment without comment.

"There's no future in modeling," she said. "I was going to try to be an actress, but after—after Daddy died, I had to earn some money and Mother wanted me to stay in Lakeville, so I got a job on the *Journal.*"

"Do you think there's a future in that?" I asked.

"Yes," she said defensively, "I do. Mr. Mason says I show promise, and I like to work hard."

I KNEW what Mason meant, but I didn't say so. It was no part of my job to suppress the youthful enthusiasm in this pert, pretty blonde creature with baby-blue eyes and upswept curls. I had heard Mason grumbling the day the Old Man called him in and told him to put Janet on the staff, and I knew that everybody in the place felt she owed her job solely to the fact that she had been Tad Gordon's daughter.

It might have been a mistake to give her the job, but it was certainly no more than Tad Gordon deserved. He was the closest we ever came to a great reporter on the *Journal*—a powerful hulk of a man who had covered two wars with distinction, who had added luster to our Washington bureau, and had come home to die after doing a brilliant undercover series on conditions in postwar Europe. His widow had been left with Janet and a few insurance policies overburdened with loans.

In spite of her fresh, vibrant youthfulness, I felt sorry for the kid. To make any headway, she'd have to accomplish twice as much as anybody else on the same job, and from what I'd heard, I was not at all sure that she could do it.

"Do you know anything about this murder?" I asked her.

"Only what Mr. Mason told me on the phone this morning. Do you?"

"About the same, I guess. A guy named Frank Turner was found shot to death in his house in Littleton this morning. He was a real estate dealer, 45 to 50 years old. He had lived in the town only about two years and never had any trouble that the police knew of. Nobody arrested yet, but I understood Harrity has a couple of suspects."

"Who's Harrity?" she asked.

"Harrity," I said, "is the first guy we go to see. He's the chief of police in Littleton. Rugged old character. Not too old at that, I guess—55 or so. Loves to talk. He can drink a gallon of whiskey in a day without showing it. He used to be head dick on the force, and never took a nickel. When the reform crowd got in, they made Jess chief because he was about the only honest cop they could find around. Now they're all honest, because if the boys start to play, Jess knocks their heads together. There hasn't been much crime in Littleton since Jess took over. He really hates crooks."

I looked around and saw that Janet was eating it up.

"Harrity sounds wonderful," she said. "So do you. "I am beginning to see what it takes to be a reporter."

"What do you mean?"

"Well—I can see you have to be interested in people like Harrity, and know a lot about them, and understand what makes them tick, in order to find out what they know. Just as you must have to know a lot about politicians and lobbyists, and their motives, to handle that investigation of the highway bill you've been working on."

"Let's not talk about that," I said. "I'm on a vacation from that—and mighty glad of it."

I had been trying to dig up a scandal for the Old Man—Arthur Cranston, publisher of the *Journal*—in connection with the

Legislature's passage of a $27,000,000 highway improvement bill. We were pretty sure some palms had been crossed because the bill went through just about the way the cement companies and the road machinery manufacturers wanted it, but I hadn't been able to prove anything yet, although I had some leads that I was going nuts trying to follow. Mason gave me the murder assignment because he knew I was going stale on the political investigation.

"You need a change of pace," he said, "and so does the *Journal*. We aren't going to sell any papers with this political stuff until we get the lowdown on somebody."

It was all right with me. I hadn't been on a crime story for years, but at the moment solving a murder case seemed simple by comparison with the problem of getting through the labyrinth laid down around the highway improvement bill.

Besides, here I was out in the open air, rolling along through beautiful country with a mighty attractive girl who seemed to like me. It was too good to be true, of course. About the time I was feeling most set up about the whole thing, Janet called my attention to a big sedan pulled up beside the road about 200 feet ahead of us. As I slowed down, I saw that it carried license plate No. 2. This meant it was an official state car. When we drew alongside it, a plump, dapper little man arose from the running board and came toward us. We recognized each other at the same instant.

"Hello, Dooley," I said. "Are you out studying the fauna of our great state, or trying to figure out how much cement can be used to double the width of this road?"

THE guy was Dooley Williams, confidential secretary to Governor Anderson and generally credited with having log-rolled the highway bill through the Legislature. He was one of the key figures in my investigation, but I hadn't been able to pin anything definite on him yet. Jovial, as he invariably was with reporters, he ignored my crack about cement and smiled his big, golden smile.

"Well, Dawson," he said, "this is my lucky day after all." He turned his smile on Janet. "Of course, if this is an elopement, I'll wait for another car to come along."

I introduced him to Janet, and said:

"You know reporters don't have time to elope. Get in. We're on our way to Littleton, to cover a murder."

"That's where I'm going, too," he said.

He pushed in beside Janet, moving her into very close physical contact with me. It occurred to me that that fat bottom of his had finally served a useful purpose.

"What happened to your car?" I asked him.

"Don't know," he said. "I just gave up. I am helpless on anything mechanical, so I just had to sit there."

His voice, as I had noticed before, had a funny way of rising to a high pitch, almost shrill, as he came to the end of a sentence.

"Did you check the gas tank?"

"Yes," he said, "there's plenty of gas."

We drove on, after I had checked an impulse to look under the hood of the sedan. I am mechanically illiterate, too, but I was almost willing to bet that there was a purposely disconnected wire somewhere in the entrails of Mr. Williams' car. However, after a little meditation, I quietly laughed off my own suspicion. What could the guy gain by stopping me on an open highway to bum a ride?

Nothing, I finally decided.

Janet obviously fascinated him, and he turned on the charm with which he had so successfully persuaded so many legislators to vote his way.

"Tad Gordon's daughter!" he exclaimed. "Well! I knew Tad very well indeed. Best reporter that ever lived, begging Dawson's pardon. Helped me get elected state senator from the old Fourth ward in Millersburg, Tad did."

This, strangely enough, was true. But Gordon had lived to regret it, as Williams became transformed from his original role of rebel against political machines into a powerful, behind-the-scenes dispenser of machine patronage. His hold over the current Governor was notorious, and I had discovered among other things that he was the principal owner of a dummy corporation which seemed to exist primarily as a repository for undercover political slush funds.

"Dooley," I said, breaking in on him, "tell Miss Gordon about the time you saved Governor Anderson's life."

"Oh, that," he said. "Everybody knows about that."

"I don't," said Janet. "I've been away at school most of the last four years."

"It wasn't much," Williams said, modestly. "One night, when I was conferring with the Governor at his house, a man, obviously a fanatic of some kind, pushed his way in and came at the Governor with a pistol. I tackled him just as he was firing, and the bullet went into the ceiling. He kicked me in the chin and ran away. He was never found."

"Didn't he have a thick beard?" I asked.

"Yes," Williams said, "probably a disguise."

"It always seemed a little fishy to me," I said, brutally.

"To you, it would," he retorted. "You're even trying to find something fishy in a bill designed to give this state of ours the fine, improved highway system which it needs and deserves. You are the kind of reporter who would suspect the motives of a mother trying to help her only child."

"I might, at that," I admitted. "Especially if the only child happened to be in the pen and the mother had money to spend to get him out."

This was an oblique reference to a pardon-selling scandal that had developed in the closing days of another administration with which Williams had been connected. He let it pass, and staved off further argument by asking us about the murder. We told him what we knew, and discovered in return that he was booked for a very busy day in Littleton, himself. Morning conference with the county chairman and his ward-heelers. Speech to the Kiwanis Club at noon. Visit to the state home for the indigent in the afternoon, and an address before the Civic Betterment League in the evening.

"Why does a guy go into politics," I asked, "if it means that he has to go through days like that? Does power or money make up for all that clap-trap."

"The cynical Mr. Dawson forgets that there is such a thing as public service," Williams replied, pompously.

"The cynical Mr. Dawson," I said, "hasn't seen enough evidence of it to be over-impressed."

Again he declined to fight back, and turned his attention to Janet, who had dug into my ribs in disapproval at a couple of my nastier cracks. I detected a few tentative attempts on his part to get in some fatherly knee-pats with his chubby left hand. When Janet frustrated him by crossing her knees and leaning in my direction, I smiled my appreciation.

WE MADE the last 50 miles, which is a fairly straight stretch, in a little less than 50 minutes, and were parked in front of the Hotel Littleton before 11 o'clock. We all registered, and Williams was effusive in his thanks for the ride. He insisted that he wanted us to be his guests at the dinner that night.

"They're going to put on a real feast," he said. "Steaks that thick—and all the liquor you want."

I knew he thought free liquor was open sesame to the confidence of a reporter, and I regretted that some reporters had given him cause for thinking so. But I didn't want him putting us in that category.

"We can buy our own liquor," I said brusquely. "We'll be in the cocktail lounge between 5:30 and 6, and if we can get to the dinner, we will."

Janet wanted to go to her room and primp, but I kiboshed that.

"We have two deadlines to meet between now and three o'clock," I said. "I'll give you three minutes in the little girls' room on the mezzanine."

I watched her walk up the stairs, and saw that she was drawing glances from several other males in the lobby. She was very trim in her well-fitted blue suit and white blouse with a collar open at the throat. Her legs didn't exactly discourage attention, either.

"Now I know what they mean by wolf-bait," I thought; and somehow, the thought was quite saddening. She was so young and fresh and eager, and I didn't like to contemplate what five years in the newspaper business might do to her.

She was back fast, and we took a cab to the police station. I could see that she was excited again, and I took her hand and told her to relax. She let it linger in mine for a second.

"You don't like Mr. Williams much, do you?" she asked.

"Not much," I admitted. "Do you?"

"No," she said, "but he's rather fascinating—in a disgusting sort of way, if you know what I mean."

"Yes, I guess I do." There wasn't much time just then for figuring out the vagaries of a female mind. We were in front of the Littleton police station, a dirty, red-brick monstrosity bearing the date "1883" above the doorway. I led Janet inside, past the desk sergeant, who must have known me vaguely because he made no move to keep us from going right on into the chief's office.

JESS HARRITY looked bigger than ever, sitting there in a cushioned swivel chair behind the old-fashioned roll-top desk. He smiled and waved, but made no effort to lift his bulk off the chair.

"Well," he said, "what's this—newlyweds?" I had forgotten how incredibly soft his voice was.

I felt my ears turning red, and looked at Janet. She was blushing, too. My laugh was a little feeble.

"That's the second time we've heard that crack today," I said to Harrity. "We're getting a little tired of it."

"Then you shouldn't look the part so thoroughly," he retorted. "Why don't you introduce me to the young lady?"

"Jess," I said, "this is Janet Gordon, the Lakeville *Journal's* newest reporter. Tad Gordon's daughter. Miss Gordon, Chief Harrity."

Janet looked at me a little reproachfully, and I could see that she was biting her lip.

"I know," I said. "I'm supposed to quit introducing you as Tad Gordon's daughter. You're a reporter, yourself."

Harrity didn't get it.

"I'm very pleased to meet you," he said. "I knew your father years back. A fine man he was, too." The remnant of a brogue came through an occasional word in his speech. "Is there a shortage of news in Lakeville, that you two come traipsin' down to our poor little city?"

"There's a shortage of murders," I replied. "We've got lots of news about politicians and lobbyists and university budgets, but you've got all the murders."

"One murder," he corrected me. "One little murder in two years, and you come down on me like vultures. A simple thing it is, too, not worth the time of busy reporters from the great capital city."

"So?" I said. "If it's so simple that you have got a signed confession and the murderer is locked up in your crummy jail, we'll just take a few notes and be out of your way. If it's any less simple than that, it's going to cost you a drink—unless, by some miracle, you've gone on the wagon."

A grin spread over his round, red, honest face.

"My boy," he said, "you know better than that. Father Cleary always told me—and he was right—that if a man doesn't drink or smoke, you have to be on guard against him, because everybody does something. And me, I can't stand the taste of tobacco."

He swung around in his chair, opened a large bottom drawer in the old desk, and pulled out a quart bottle of Bourbon, half empty.

"For the young lady," he said, "there's a glass."

He lifted himself out of the chair, and walked to a wash basin in a corner. I had seen Jess Harrity often, but I always marveled anew at his size and the way he carried it. He was well over six feet, broad and thick, and must have been toting at least 230 pounds. Yet he moved across the floor with the agility of a basketball player.

I saw Janet try to repress a shudder when he handed her a tumbler half filled with whiskey. I didn't know much about the child, and nothing about her drinking habits, but it seemed obvious that she was unaccustomed to large alcoholic jolts on an empty stomach, before midday. I smiled at her.

"You don't have to drink it," I said, as Harrity handed me the bottle.

She smiled back, and tossed off most of the whiskey, as if to say, I won't be outdone and I won't be patronized. While I tipped the bottle, I watched her move, in a fair hurry, to the wash basin, where she drew herself a chaser and downed it. By the time she got back to the desk, Harrity was absorbing a final snort that didn't leave much in the bottle.

"George," she said, "may I have a cigarette, please?"

I caught the exaggerated attempt at non-

chalance, and I knew she was wondering whether Harrity's low-grade Bourbon would ever stop burning her insides. I was having a little difficulty with it, too. While I lighted cigarettes for both of us, Harrity put the bottle back in the desk and locked the drawer.

"Want to see the body?" he asked. "It's right around the corner."

I nodded, and we all walked to the undertaking parlor. As we reached the door of the shabby, somber little place, Janet tossed her cigarette away and threw back her shoulders.

I grasped her arm firmly, but she pulled away in resentment.

"I'm perfectly all right," she insisted, too vehemently.

I had a few interior butterflies myself, although death was a fairly common story to me. However, it wasn't bad, and Janet took it standing up.

THE object of our curiosity was very peaceful. We knew there was a bullet hole in the back of his head, but I didn't ask to see it and nobody insisted on showing it. The guy was medium-sized, middle-aged and thin-faced, and his thin, grayish hair was neatly combed. We didn't take a very long look. Janet stood there until I touched her elbow, and we walked out into the fresh air together.

"Ever see him any place?" Harrity asked. "Know anything about him?"

We shook our heads.

"All I know is what we got in the early story this morning," I said. "His name is Frank Turner, and he was in the real estate business."

Harrity nodded, and led the way back to his office, where he reclined again in his big swivel chair.

"He was a partner in the Ideal Real Estate Company," he said. "Only been here a couple of years, and caused us no trouble. Came from Chicago, far as I can find out, but the cops there got no line on him."

"You said this was a simple case," I reminded him.

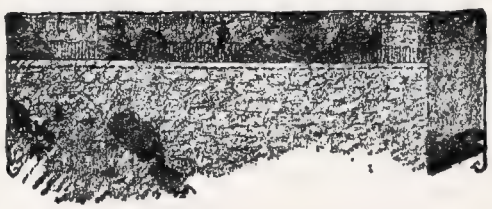
"That it is," he replied. "Only two people coulda done it. I got evidence they was both at his house last night, and his maid found him dead this morning. One's a widow named Lucy Marston, the other's his partner. French guy named Francois Lemay."

"What makes you think he might have killed Turner?" I asked.

"Only three things people kill for," said Harrity, "unless they're drunk or crazy—love, money and revenge. The widow was in love with Turner, or maybe she was just getting money out of him. Anyway, I got witnesses who saw her at his house often, including last night. And I got witnesses who saw this Lemay leave the house last night after the widow was there."

"Must have been a mass meeting right in front of the house," I said.

"Neckers," the chief explained. "Coupla carloads of kids and their girl friends. Turner's house is up in a kind of half-developed suburb, and the road is off by itself. I guess a lot of neckin' goes on up there. It's a thing you can't stop even if you try. You can preach against it and legislate against it, but you can't make it unpopular."



"You're quite a philosopher, Jess," I said, "but how did you find out about these kids?"

"They came in after they heard what happened. Good kids—they were kinda scared, but they knew they should tell the police what they saw."

"And even at night, they recognized Lemay and Mrs. Marston?" I asked.

"Sure," he said, "everybody in town knows Lemay. He's a kind of half-breed. Says he's one-eighth Indian, but he looks a hell of a lot more. Some of the kids knew the widow. She used to be married to old man Marston, the banker, and there's been a lot of gossip about her goin' here and there with men, but there's nothin' really against her, I guess. Besides, I don't really need witnesses. Both of 'em admit being at Turner's house last night. Naturally, they both say Turner was O.K. when they left, but the kids say they both lit out of there pretty fast.

"I kinda favor the widow as the killer,

at that. [illegible]as there first, and the other guy might ve just been running away from the corpse. She's a mean dame, too, you can tell that by talking to her. Exactly the kind of woman who'd plug a man that was trying to give her the toss."

"Have you pulled her in yet?"

"Naw, I'm just lettin' her sit for a while, until the dicks turn up some stuff on her. She's not going any place. Got a guy watching her house."

I pulled a wad of copy paper out of my pocket and made a few notes. Then I turned to Janet, who had been sitting in silent awe as the chief unwrapped his theories.

"Your story," I said, "is the woman's angle. Go talk to the dame and see what you can get out of her. Call the desk by three o'clock with whatever you get. I'll call now with the story for the early afternoon edition, and later with whatever develops. And after you get through with Mrs. Marston, go over to the Littleton *Times* and pick up all the pictures they've got on the case. Mason made a dicker for us to buy 'em. Since the economy wave struck, he won't send one of our own photographers more than six blocks from the office. I'll see you at the Littleton Hotel cocktail lounge by five-thirty."

Janet jumped up, grabbed her handbag, and inquired sweetly:

"Shall I ask for a new picture of Chief Harrity, too?"

My reaction must have been about that of an established movie star who has just had a scene stolen from him by a brat of a child, but I gave back with the same sweetness.

"By all means," I said. "We certainly ought to have a nice new picture of Mr. Harrity."

At this point, Mr. Harrity reached for one of the two telephones on his desk.

"Wait a minute, Miss Gordon," he said. "I'll send you in a squad car."

"Well, I'll be damned," I exploded. "Harrity is going to send send you in a squad car, even if the taxpayers are screaming about how much the police department costs. I am beginning to see the value of a college education on a murder story, especially when it's accompanied by a pair of big, baby-blue eyes."

Janet gave me a baby-blue glare, and stuck out her tongue; then turned to Harrity and thanked him prettily.

In response to the chief's call, a red-faced, broad-shouldered individual introduced as Detective-sergeant Herrick came into the room for orders. When Harrity told him to drive Miss Gordon to the Marston house and anywhere else she wanted to go, his relish for his assignment broke out all over him. He took Janet's ridiculously tiny bag as though it were a great burden that he was proud to assume for her, and ushered her out the door with much play of his big left hand on her charming right arm. Moreover, she acted as if she liked it.

"I hope," I said to Harrity, "that that guy is not under the impression that he has just started out on a blind date with a pony from the chorus."

"What the hell!" Harrity sputtered. "Sure he's all right. He's got a wife and three kids."

"They're not getting much of his attention at the moment," I said.

The chief grinned at me.

"Not jealous, are you, son?" he asked.

"Of a flatfooted dick?" I sneered. "Hell, no. I just want to be sure Janet keeps her mind on her work."

FRANKLY, the violence of my own reaction to such a harmless little scene startled me when I thought about it. Fortunately, I couldn't think about it long, because it was past time to call the office with my little nuggets of information.

I gave what I had to Hawley, our best rewrite man, and he took it without comment.

"I suppose," I concluded, "that you are going to add the usual corn about an arrest being imminent. Just remember, please, that the Old Man doesn't like libel suits and nobody has been charged with a damned thing in this case yet."

"Take it easy, Dawson," he said. "We'll just hint at mysterious developments until you really turn up some news."

I told him that I would call back at three o'clock, news or no news, and that Janet would give him her interview with the widow in time for the final home edition.

About that, I was quite wrong. Five minutes after Hawley hung up, Janet was

on the line to me at the station with tears in her voice.

"Mrs. Marston won't talk," she said in a mournful, little girl voice.

"Then you have to persuade her," I said. "Get her started on a female discussion of her garden, or the Ladies' Aid Society, or somthing."

"She won't let me in," Janet replied.

I exploded. "What the hell! Can't your big, burly boy friend, the sergeant, even get you past the door?"

"He tried," said Janet, "but Mrs. Marston is standing on her constitutional rights."

I groaned.

"All right," I said curtly, "get over to the *Times* and see if you can get those pictures. Better ask a man; you don't seem to do so well with women."

It was a nasty crack, and I knew Janet was crying when she hung up, but I was disgusted. More disgusted than the situation warranted, I can see now. We could get along without an interview with the widow. I guess I was just galled because the kid had fallen down on her first assignment.

I went back to the chief's office, and found Harrity on the telephone. When he finished the call, he swung around toward me with a big smile on his moon-like face.

"First break, Dawson," he said. "Turner had a bank account in Chicago with $14,000 in it."

"Where does that get you?" I asked.

"I don't know yet, but I gotta hunch it will get me some place. People have been killed for a lot less dough than that. I'm checking now to see if he's got any heirs. Meantime, I want to talk to Lemay and the widow again."

I looked at my watch. It was nearly two.

"Do me a favor," I said. "Call the widow in first."

He did, but it took a threat of arrest as a material witness to get her to budge.

She was a dark, chunky woman, carefully corseted and neatly dressed. Her deep-set, brown eyes were filled with fear and suspicion.

"This is outrageous," she said to Harrity. "I have told the police all I know."

"Sit down, Mrs. Marston," the chief said. "There's been a new development. Do you know whether Mr. Turner had relatives in Chicago?"

"No." The reply came in a flat, dead voice.

"Business connections?"

"No."

"Did he ever go to Chicago?"

"Yes—I think so, once in a while."

"Did you ever go with him?"

MRS. MARSTON rose in dignified indignation.

"I don't have to submit to insults," she said.

Harrity was suddenly very firm.

"Sit down, Mrs. Marston," he said, emphatically. "We can find out these things without your help, but if you're really cooperating with the police, you'll tell us. Now, did you ever go to Chicago with Mr. Turner?"

Mrs. Marston wilted.

"Yes," she admitted, "a few times."

But she wouldn't admit anything else. She had gone to Chicago to visit her sister, and had merely accepted Turner's offer to ride with him in his car. She didn't know what he did there. She had never seen him go near a bank. He had never mentioned relatives or business connections, although he always went "on business."

"And, of course," Harrity said, "it was on business that you went to see him last night."

"I told you," she replied, "that my house is up for sale and Frank—Mr. Turner—was handling the deal."

"So you did," the chief said, thoughtfully. "We'll keep in touch with you, Mrs. Marston."

With the heat off, she seemed to deflate and her shoulders sagged, but she made a real try at keeping her head up as she walked out.

"A born liar," Harrity said. "But I really haven't got a damned thing on her. You haven't got any idea where I can find the gun that killed Turner, have you?"

"You're a born comedian," I said, and walked out to the desk to use a telephone. I called the office and got Hawley again.

"Here's Janet's interview with the widow," I told him. "I'm calling it in because she had to go after pictures."

When I hung up, the chief was standing behind me. He placed his big mitt on my shoulder, and chuckled.

"Got it bad, haven't you, boy?" he said. "Well—can't say I blame you. She's mighty handsome."

I could feel my ears turning purple.

"Nuts!" I said. "What shall we do or have a drink while we wait for Lemay?"

We returned to Harrity's office and finished off his Bourbon. It hit me a little. I hadn't had any lunch, and did not seem to want any, especially after the whiskey began to glow.

Lemay was even less helpful than Mrs. Marston had been, although he seemed to be trying harder. He was a roly-poly little keg of a man, with almost no hair and an obsequious manner. He knew Turner had driven to Chicago for an occasional weekend, but professed not to know why.

"None of my business," he said, virtuously.

"You were his partner, weren't you?" Harrity asked.

"Wet let each other alone." The tone of voice was almost a whimper.

"You didn't let him alone last night."

"That was just a—discussion over a deal."

"And it turned into a fight, maybe?"

"Oh, no, sir. A fight, no. A little argument, maybe. But we never fight."

The chief had been doodling with a pencil. He whirled away from the desk suddenly and faced Lemay.

"Did you ever own a .38 pistol?" he asked.

The little guy cringed, but he didn't give.

"Not me, no, SIR!" he said. "I never had a gun in my life."

There were more questions, but they developed no more information. Lemay waddled out of the station, resisting an obvious inclination to run like hell, and the chief leaned back in his swivel chair.

"Well," he said, "I can wait. Eventually, one of them is going to get tied up with that Chicago bank account. That dough was deposited by Mr. Turner in person, and in cash, usually in $1,000 chunks—and there have been very few withdrawals. The dicks are checking all the angles on that. Have you got a story?"

"Not much of a one," I said. Such as it was, I gave it to Hawley, and told him not to be too optimistic about any sensational breaks right away.

"The Old Man is crying for blood," Hawley reported.

"Let him cry," I said. "I can't conjure up killers out of the atmosphere."

"However, that's what he expects of the great Dawson."

"Go pound your typewriter," I said, and hung up. A great dissatisfaction with the whole damned affair was creeping over me. I went back to see Harrity.

"Chief," I said, "if you will lead me to your favorite taproom, I'll gladly buy you a drink."

"No, my boy," he replied. "The chief of police cannot drink in saloons. However—" He reached back into the bottom drawer of his desk and found another bottle.

Harrity seemed as bright as a button when I left him at five o'clock, but I was both woozy and depressed when I got to the hotel. The cocktail lounge was well filled, smoky and noisy, but there was no sign of Janet. I sat down at a little table for two, and ordered a Scotch and soda.

"I've often wondered how that would mix with straight Bourbon," I said to myself. The waiter brought some popcorn and potato chips with the drink, and I devoured the plateful before I knew I was eating.

After that, the Scotch seemed to go all right; so I ordered another one. This was about half gone when I saw Janet come into the lobby. She had a large package under one arm, and a brisk young man in a checked suit was hanging onto the other. They stopped before they reached the lounge entrance, and their conversation was punctuated with smiles. The young man finally left, after patting Janet's hand, arm and shoulder enthusiastically about a dozen times, and she came on into the lounge.

I made only a token effort to rise as she reached my table and sat down, placing the package on the floor beside her chair.

"The pictures are in there," she said. "I had quite a time rounding them all up."

"I'm glad you got something."

"Do you have to be so nasty?" she asked. Her eyes were moist, but she was being as defiant as possible. I took a drink, and switched the subject.

"Did you have any lunch?"

"Yes—Art bought me a sandwich and a beer."

"And who in hell is Art?" I shouted. I had not intended to raise my voice, but I could hear it booming around the place, and several people looked over at us. Janet flushed, but she answered the question.

"Arthur Russell, city editor of the *Times*. He brought me over here. He—he was very helpful about the pictures."

"I'll bet he was," I said. "So that's the jerk I saw giving you the feel treatment in the lobby! You really get a going-over from the boys, don't you? You walk out of the station with Sergeant Herrick and come into the hotel with this kid city editor pawing you. Even Dooley Williams was playing knees-y with you in the car. You're the kind of dame who invites passes; if you didn't, you wouldn't get so many."

MY VOICE had risen again, and the whole lounge seemed to be giving us the eye. Janet grabbed her package and stood up, her face white with fury and embarrassment. She leaned over the table and talked right down my throat.

"You're a second-class brute, George Dawson," she said in an impassioned whisper. "I'm sorry I ever had anything to do with you. I'm sorry I ever saw you. I—I'm sorry I called Hawley this afternoon and gave him a new angle for your story."

It was my turn to be nonplussed.

"You—what?" I asked.

"Art Russell called the police station and found out Turner had a big bank account in Chicago. It was too late to waste time calling you, so I called the office direct. Hawley seemed very pleased." She was quite triumphant.

"I'll bet he did!" I said grimly. "Why you—you fake sob sister, you imitation campus reporter, I was in on that angle the second it developed. Hawley had it from me long before you heard about it. For God's sake, why don't you stick to necking and leave reporting to those that know something about it? No wonder the staff thinks you're trading on Tad Gordon's name, you—"

I was half out of my chair, with the highball glass in my hand, and Janet was scurrying out of the lounge as fast as her pretty legs could carry her. As she disappeared, I brought the glass down hard and it smashed against the table, flying into countless pieces. I pulled my hand away from a jagged fragment, and noticed blood on my index finger. I was staring at it stupidly when a waiter rushed up with a towel and started mopping up the mess. He was followed by Dooley Williams, red of face and more jovial than usual.

"Well," he said, "what goes on? First, I find the little lady running through the lobby with tears in her eyes, and now I come across the great reporter with a broken glass in his hand. Is there anything I can do?"

"Sit down, Dooley," I said, "and have a drink." For the first time in my life, I was glad to see the fat crook.

"Don't mind if I do," said Dooley, "although I've already had a couple with the boys upstairs. I just can't get through one of these civic uplift things without a little libation."

The waiter eyed me dubiously, but he brought a couple of Scotches at Dooley's

request. The rest of the customers finally quit looking at me, and went back to their drinking.

"Dooley," I said, "I like women. I can even stand 'em in a newspaper office. But a dame on a murder story is—murder. Especially a dame—oh, hell, let's have a drink."

"Here's to male reporters," said Dooley, lifting his glass.

We were in fairly mellow shape by the time we went upstairs, but the dinner was good and the pheasant plentiful and by the time it was over I was more sleepy than

anything else. To my surprise, Janet showed up. She was wearing a dark-blue dress which set off her blondness very effectively, and she had obliterated all traces of tears. She spoke quite charmingly to Dooley, but looked right through me without a word.

During dinner I noticed that she was placed down the table, between a baldish gent with gold teeth and a spruce young man in an oxford gray pin stripe. She appeared to be giving both earnest and affable attention. The president of the Civic Betterment League, seated at my right, called my attention to a hawk-faced woman across the table from Jane.

"If looks could kill, the girl would be dead now," he said.

"Why?"

"That's her husband on the other side of Miss Gordon. She's very jealous."

"I should think," I said, "that the wife of the guy on the other side would have more cause."

"He has no wife. He's the secretary of the Chamber of Commerce, and one of our most eligible young men."

FOR a moment, I had a lot of sympathy for Mrs. Hawk-Face. Harrity had accused me of being jealous, and I was beginning to see how right he was. And I was jealous of the damnedest people, too. With fewer fumes in my head, I realized what an ass I had made of myself in the cocktail lounge. Then I began to argue with myself. As a reporter, she stinks. She had no right to call the office without consulting me. But I had no right to lose my temper. But she—and so on, until the remains of the baked Alaska had been taken away. I never knew how it tasted.

The program began with the usual address of welcome from the president, a report on progress, etc., and a plea for money "to carry on our great work." Dooley Williams was the piece de resistance, and he was never more eloquent.

"Our administration," he said, "your administration is being attacked by the vested interests because it is trying to do something for you, the people of this great state. Because we have taxed the swollen profits of greedy corporations to provide for your safety and your well-being, we are vilified by the kept press, the press that bows down before its masters, the corporations."

He paused to take a drink of water, and looked right at me with a big smile on his face.

"Our plan for highway improvement," he said, "is essential to the growth of our great state, to the development of your commerce and industry—to the safety of your children, whom you love so well. More than seven hundred persons were killed on our inadequate highways last year, and thousands more injured. We must build better highways, and safer highways.

"In your own great city of Littleton, you have an outstanding example of human sacrifice to the greed of Mammon. Four people killed at the intersection of the Littleton-Wabena highways before your city council saw fit to provide money for a warning blinker. And that blinker—what a beautiful beacon of safety and civic progress it is, as it lights up the word STOP in red and gold at night. How heart-warming it is to me to see it blazing there as a symbol of the progressiveness of you good citizens of Littleton.

"You have recognized your responsibility to your children and your fellow man. The state must do likewise. All over this great state, we must make our intersections safe, our highways broad and modern. Etc., etc."

I had heard most of it before, and the words buzzed in and out of my ears as I tried to shake off the drowsiness induced by too many drinks and too much food. I remember thinking:

"Even if we could print a picture of Dooley taking money from a lobbyist, these people wouldn't believe it. He's so plausible and sounds so righteous that he's got them sewed up in his pants pocket."

They confirmed the thought with the applause they gave him. It woke me up completely.

After the meeting adjourned, all kinds of people crowded around Dooley to shake his hand and tell him what a fine speech he'd made. I even told him so, myself.

THEN I tried to find Janet. Much as I dislike crow, I had decided that she had an apology coming. But Janet was gone, and no amount of searching turned up any

trace of her. The baldish gent she had been sitting with, who turned out to be Mr. Gerond, a hardware merchant, said she had excused herself at the conclusion of Dooley's speech and he hadn't seen her since.

"Quite a dish, isn't she?" he tittered.

I thought for a minute she had gone out with the Chamber of Commerce glamor boy, but I ran him down in a corner, surrounded by women, and he likewise reported no knowledge of her whereabouts. Dooley Williams didn't know, either.

"I hope she comes back," he said. "I wanted to dance with her."

"You go leer at your beloved citizenry," I said. "I'll try to find Janet."

When I found she wasn't in her own room, or any of the hotel's public rooms, I gave up and went back to the ballroom. Janet had not returned, but the dance was on and Dooley was whirling with an iron-clad matron. What I saw there held no interest; I went to the lobby for my key, bought the local paper and a couple of magazines, and took the elevator to my floor. I half expected—or hoped—to find Janet hiding behind the door of my room, but she wasn't there—or under the bed, either. I called Harrity and asked him if there was anything new.

"Not yet," he said. "I'll call you when there is."

I was asleep almost before I could get into my pajamas. In my dreams, Janet, clad only in a pale blue nightgown, ran down a broad, paved highway pursued by a great crowd of men, all reaching out their hands for her. I was chasing them, but the men seemed to be getting farther and farther away from me, and closer and closer to Janet. When the telephone awakened me, I said "Janet!" out loud before I lifted the receiver.

Harrity, not Janet, was on the other end.

"Better get over here to the station, Dawson," he said. "Things are cracking on this case."

"What things?" I asked sleepily.

"I can't tell you on the telephone. Wake up, and get over here."

I got, with the aid of a chilly shower and a glass of cold water. It was shortly after midnight.

There was no sign of taxicab life, or much of any other kind, on Littleton's deserted streets; so I walked around to the hotel garage and took my car out. The chill morning air made me shiver, and brought me out of my torpor. In spite of a rigid personal rule against smoking before breakfast, I lighted a cigarette, in a confused hope that the smoke might clear some of the fuzz out of my mouth. It seemed only to accentuate the odor of stale whiskey that I couldn't shake off.

Operating the automobile brought me back to almost complete consciousness, and with it came a heart-stopping fear. Where was Janet? What had happened to her? Why had I gone to sleep instead of continuing to search for her?

I burst into the police station, and into Harrity's office, at a fast trot. Before he could say a word, I grabbed his telephone, called the hotel and asked for Janet's room.

"Miss Gordon left word that she is not to be disturbed," the operater reported. After a little futile sparring, I hung up, somewhat relieved but still mystified.

"The young lady is all right," said Harrity softly.

"How do you know?" I asked.

He smiled, and told me to sit down.

"Just take it from me, she's all right," he said. "Now, if you can regain your manners and your interest in your job, tell me—did you hear Dooley Williams' speech at the hotel last night?"

"Yes," I said, "as much of it as I could stomach."

"What did he talk about?"

"The usual clap-trap. Our great state must be made safe for you and your children, and that sort of hogwash. Meaning, of course, that Dooley Williams must be allowed to go on taking dough from lobbyists."

"Now, think a little bit," the chief said. "Do you remember anything he said about the warning beacon at the Wabena-Littleton intersection?"

"Yes—I recall that he mentioned it. Something about its being a bright, shining symbol of civic righteousness, or words to that effect."

Harrity leaned back in his chair, and began tapping his pudgy fingers together.

"Do you know," he asked, "when that beacon was put into operation?" I didn't.

"Last night," he said.

My wits were still slightly scrambled, and I did not catch it right away.

"Last night?" I repeated. But he sounded as if he were describing an old friend. "If it just started to operate last night, why—"

"Why, Dooley Williams was in Littleton last night," the chief added, "and he doesn't seem able to prove otherwise. The boys have been working on him for quite a while, in the back room."

I must have jumped pretty high, because Harrity restrained me.

"They've just been asking him questions," he said. "We don't use rubber hose in this police station."

I had not recovered from my incredulity.

"Do you mean you think Williams committed this murder?" I asked. "Why?"

"If he was here last night, he could have," Harrity said. "As for his motive, I thought you might be able to give me that. You been investigating the guy, haven't you?"

The telephone rang, and the chief listened for a minute with no more comment than a couple of "uh-huhs." When he turned back to me, I was hammering my forehead.

"The bank account!" I said. "The bank account in Chicago. I found out in the lobby investigation that Williams had a dummy corporation with a bank account at the Second National in Milwaukee. I wasn't able to get authorization to see its statements—the state banking department blocked that—but I have a hell of a suspicion that a lot of cash went in and out of that account. Could some of it have gone into Turner's?"

Harrity picked up the telephone again, and told the desk sergeant to place calls to the Milwaukee and Chicago detective bureaus.

"We'll know by the time the banks open," he said. "That other call was from Wabena. That's a small place, as you know, and the cops have found a guy who swears he saw Williams driving through there last night."

"What does Dooley say?" I inquired.

"He don't know about the Wabena witness yet. But he's got absolutely no alibi. He says he had dinner at the Park Hotel in Lakeville last night—which is true enough—and retired to his apartment, and didn't budge out of it till morning. Since he lives alone in a ground floor apartment in a big building, there's no way of proving that either true or false, unless we find a witness who saw him come home in the wee, small hours—and I doubt we're gonna be that lucky."

I was shaking my head, and trying to dope it out.

"It may add up," I said, "but it's all damned circumstantial. What the hell would he kill Turner for?"

"Looks to me like it was for money," the chief replied. "He's mixed up in a lotta crooked dough, as you found out. Maybe this guy Turner was bleeding him."

"But—" I said, "Turner wasn't involved in any of the lobbying, or in politics. I know the roster on all those deals, backward and forward, and Turner just wasn't on it."

"Maybe not," Harrity conceded, "but he was mixed up with that bird some way—and we'll find out how, now that you remembered that dummy corporation. I'm much obliged to you, Dawson. With your help, I'm gonna be able to prove in a few hours that Dooley Williams put that bullet into Frank Turner's head."

Bullet. I kicked the word around, silently, for a moment.

"Bullet," I said. "Chief, that word is going to save you those hours. You aren't going to have to wait until the banks open."

"Whatta you mean?"

"If you'll take me to see Williams," I said, "I think we can wind this case up right here."

STIFLING further questions, Harrity led me through to the station to the bullpen, where Dooley was seated on a bench, more or less surrounded by three towering detectives. He was a far cry from the dapper secretary to the governor, the eloquent after-dinner speaker, the smartly tailored politician who cracked the whip over legislators and ward-heelers.

His coat was off, his shirt collar open, and his tie awry. He looked unutterably tired. But he was smoking a cigarette, and there was a spark of jauntiness left in him.

"Ha, Dawson!" he greeted me. "Maybe you can convince these—gentlemen that they are making a big mistake. They won't

listen to me. There is going to be hell to pay when the governor learns about this. Do you know they have not even allowed me to call him?"

"You won't need him—for a while," I said. "After you've been sentenced, you might be able to persuade him to pardon you—if he really thinks more of you than he does of his political future. Aren't you glad we don't execute murderers in this state?"

He threw down his cigarette, ground it into the cement floor, and stood up in a gesture of defiance.

"You're crazy," he said. "The whole thing is absolutely ridiculous."

He was too scared to make it sound as if he meant it.

"No, it isn't," I said. "You might as well tell all now, Dooley, because you haven't got a chance. We found the fake beard in Turner's house."

He turned on me, and screamed in a frightened tenor.

"It wasn't a fake beard!" he exclaimed. "It was real."

"Yah," I said, "but it was Turner's, wasn't it? He staged a phony attack on the governor and let you stop him, so you could be a hero and stay solid with the governor forever after.

"You let him get away because you had to. And you've been paying him off ever since, through that dummy company of yours, with the filthy dough you extort from lobbyists.

"And when he started to demand more and more money, you couldn't take it any longer and killed him. We found a letter in his house—"

I was virtually pushing the words down his throat. When I came to "letter" Dooley started to disintegrate, after the manner of an ice cream cone in a summer sun. He slumped back onto the bench with such a pitiable expression in his eyes that I actually felt sorry for him.

"You couldn't have found a letter," he whined. "You couldn't have found a letter."

"You thought you'd got 'em all, didn't you?" I sneered. "But there was one you didn't find."

He was licked, and he gave up. He always had been the kind who would give up if you pushed him into a corner. His giving up made me a little sick.

He turned away from me, and toward Harrity.

"All right," he said, limply, "I'll give you a statement. I—I had to do it. The man was bleeding me white."

HARRITY nodded, and one of the detectives took Williams by the arm and half-carried him into the chief's office. He was on the verge of hysteria, but he had one more taunt left for me.

"There's no credit in this for you, Dawson," he said. "You weren't smart enough—it was that girl. That damned dame trapped me some way. I saw her here when they brought me in. She did it—the dame did it."

"Shut up!" Harrity said. "When we want you to talk, we'll tell you."

I grabbed the chief's arm and held him back as the detective went on into the office

with Williams. He tapped me on the shoulder, approvingly.

"You did it, my boy," he said. "But you certainly are an awful liar. We got no letter, and I never heard of this beard business before."

"You didn't think the truth would do any good, did you?" I asked. "Now, what's this stuff about a dame? Is he talking about Janet?"

Harrity adorned his moon face with its most benign expression.

"Yes," he said. "I promised her I wouldn't tell you, but you know anyway, now. She came here last night after the dinner, and gave me the tip on the road beacon. She knew it had been put up last

night. Art Russell gave her quite a speech about it while he was driving past it on the way over to the hotel."

"And—and she didn't say anything to me?" I asked, sounding very hurt indeed.

"From what I hear," the chief said, "you weren't giving her much chance to talk. I musta given you a few too many drinks. But you might be glad to know she wouldn't tell me a thing until I agreed to give the whole story to you first, if and when it broke."

I started for the door, fast.

"Jess," I said, "I'll be back soon. I have to—"

"I know you have to," he said, "but I think you'd better go to the railroad station instead of the hotel. She was planning to catch the Chicago sleeper to Lakeville, so you wouldn't be burdened by her company on the trip back."

He looked at his watch. "Nearly two," he said. "The sleeper's due through here at 2:18."

I drove into the station parking lot at 2:14. Janet was seated inside, beside her ridiculously tiny overnight bag, and staring straight ahead of her, at nothing. She started when she saw me, but didn't get up. So I sat down. I was almost, but not quite, tongue-tied.

"Hello," I said, stupidly.

"What are you doing here?" she questioned.

"Looking for you," I said. "I want you to—hell, I just want you, that's all."

"Well, that's a quick change of pace. The last time you saw me, you didn't want any part of me."

"Baby," I whispered, "I'm sorry—I—" I was fumbling for her hand. She pulled it away, but I could feel the ice melting slightly.

"Did Harrity call you?" she asked.

"Yes, that's all settled. The case is solved. Williams confessed."

She was wide-eyed and excited.

"He did? What did the office say?"

Much to my amazement, I hadn't even thought of the office.

"I haven't called the office yet," I said. "I was sort of hoping that when I did I'd have a society page item to go along with the murder story."

"Such as what?"

"Such as an announcement of the Gordon-Dawson engagement. That would be kind of an exciting story in Lakeville, too.

IN THE distance, bells started to ring and the noise of wheels on rails penetrated the waiting room. Janet reached for her bag and started to rise, but I held her arm firmly.

"You're not going," I said. "You can't go.

"Janet—Janet darling, I'm in love with you. I want you to marry me."

She stood up, in spite of me, and I bobbed up, too, still clutching her arm.

"What makes you think I'd marry a drunken reporter?" she asked.

"The same thing," I said, "that makes me know I'll never take another drink."

For the first time, she smiled, and to me it was the most beautiful smile in the history of the world.

"No, you don't," she said. "Don't give me that going-on-the-wagon speech. From now on, you just drink at a more lady-like pace, as I do." She stood very close. "My God, George, how I want to be married to you!"

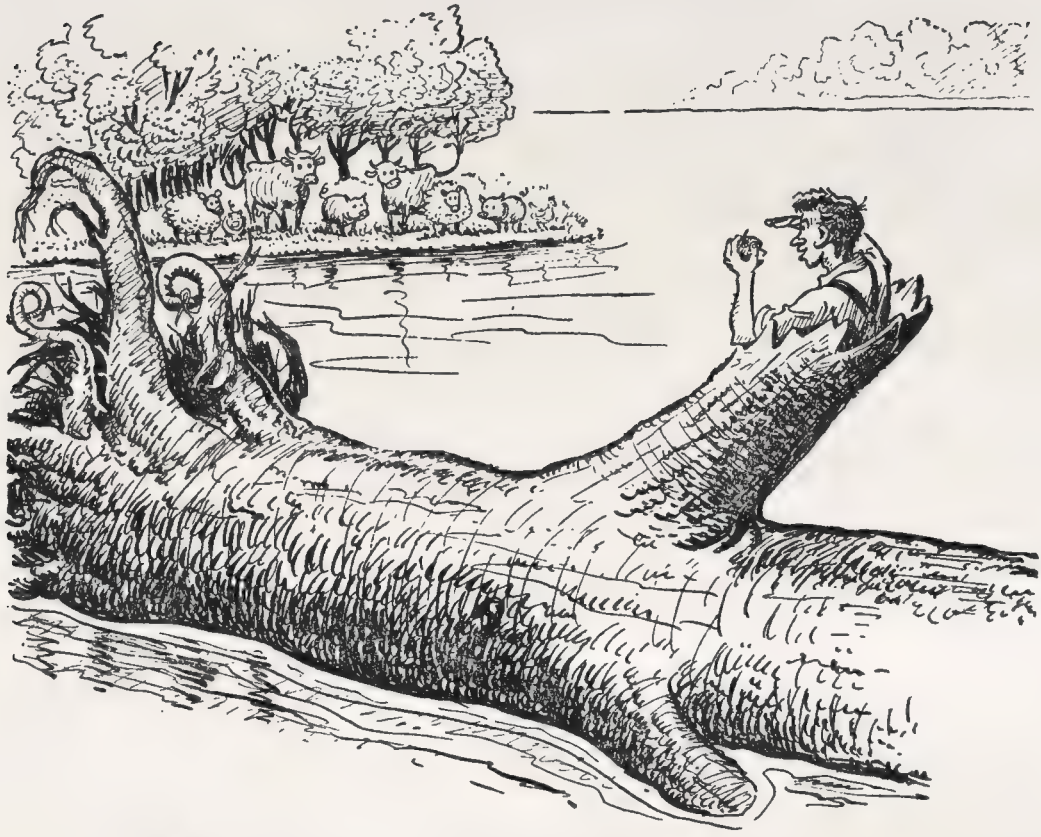
She put both hands on my neck and pulled my face down for a kiss that was both wild and tender. Then she pushed away and stared at me.

"I guess I never would have been any good as a reporter, anyway," she said, resignedly.

"The trouble is," I replied, "you'd have been too good. I couldn't afford to let my wife beat me to the punch on stories, the way you did on this one."

The few other persons who had been in the station had gone out to catch their train. We had the place all to ourselves, and we just stood there in the dim half-light, locked in the tightest embrace that the fusty old barn had ever witnessed.

Seemed Like Old Mississip' Didn't Have Any System, Morals or Regularities—Anything That Didn't Have Exceptions Worse Than the Usuals



MUDDY GUT SALVAGE

By RAYMOND S. SPEARS

A SMALL man, with short legs, long arms, over-size hands and a large head with chin and jaws covered with a bright, new copper-red beard, mustache and side-burns. His eyes were brilliant emerald green, and his bearing was intensely scornful. He was riding down the Mississippi river current on a long cottonwood snag. He had escaped a sheriff's posse which wanted to catch him, because he had tried to get away with the sides of a steer he had needed to replenish his larder on board a nice but small shantyboat. This was the Spring Tide, high water down the Lower Mississippi, and Red was obliged to leave that nice, practically new and well-found shantyboat of his because the sheriff's posse got to it first.

Thus Red came down the head-rise on a hundred-foot cottonwood snag. The water was cold and he shivered. The tree trunk was more than six feet in diameter, partly hollow, with a large, hollow limb sticking above the water. Red pulled out some of the splintery inside sticks and after comparing how big he was with the size of the hole, he did some more reaming and crawled into the snag feet first. It was a snug fit, but the snug fit was an advantage. There

wasn't any cold draft from the big hollow log; by curling his head down, Red caught his breath around him, and that was warm. Out of the cold wind, and out of the lurking cold from the water which came from melting snow and ice in the old pine and northern hardwood country, Red snuggled down.

It was better for Red to stay aboard the big snag a while. Probably that plaguey, interrupting sheriff had jurisdiction down to the Arkansaw line, or wherever, whatever states Red was in along the west side.

"I sure was lucky, gettin' this snag when I did!" Red sighed, seeing the bright side of necessity, "I mout a had to sit out on the side of a house or be'n on a whole tree trunk, without no wind-break. Dog-gone, but I'd had a big meal, too. Good thing I ate plenty. Solid meat, marrow and fat, besides them shantyboat supplies—I bet that feller that owned that shack-boat telephoned the sher'f I was comin'. That's how they kinda located me. Hit's got so'f a man finds an empty shantyboat, he cain't get away with it. I'm gettin' so I'm disgusted wit' this plaguey old Muddy Gut! Used to be a feller didn't have to watch ahead. All he had to do was keep track so's nobody'd come down from behind."

The snag, having come in close enough to be jumped, now swung out into the middle of the river, surrounded by drift. There it hung in mid-current, which showed there had been a temporary slack in the head-rise. As the day came to an end, dismal, chill and forbidding, Red looked around and all he could see was the drizzling gray rain, acres of black drift, and shores. Levee and swamp bottom submerged brakes were so far away he couldn't see either shore.

"If'n I wanted to land I'd have to swim two mile!" Red shook his head, "Good thing I don't."

With that he shrank down and began to half-think, half-dream. He felt grateful, but disappointed. Just when he had a nice shantyboat, a dog-gone scoundrel softpaw notified the authorities, and they came in full posse, and in a county launch. They caught him beefing as nice a steer as he ever confiscated, for table meat. Now he'd lost his meat, his shantyboat, and some of his confidence in Old Mississip'. Nowhere in God's world was there a trickier, more disquieting, plaguey a river—so Red went down to sleep.

THERE Red was, awakened once in a while when running drift came bumping into his snag, thrown by acres of swirlpools. When he stuck his head out, like a squirrel or 'coon, looking around, there would be the squeeze where the drift flanked into a long bend; then again when everything was all quiet, and he couldn't hear a sound, he'd look out, full of suspicion about no river voices sounding, there he'd be in the spread of a hundred acres of glassy midnight glow, with perhaps nothing but a piece of house, or a dead hog, or even a flock of wild geese in sight. One thing about Old Mississip', if'n a man didn't want any company, the middle of the river could be the lonesomest, safest place anywhere!

When morning came, it was rainy with spirals of fog circling up from the surface. There were a thousand gray ghosts dancing in the spring rain. Probably some of them were genuine ghosts, at that, circulating among the spiraling tufts of mist. Red thought what a fine thing it was he'd eaten so much the day before, finding that softpaw's shantyboat all stocked up with Arkansaw turkey, hotbread flour, sorgum, coffee, canned milk, and a lot of canned goods. A man needed a stomach as big as a Texas salt grass cow so as to fill up just in case it'd be two or three days before he got a genuine next meal.

Red stuck his head out of the hollow branch, resting his red whiskers on a comfortable piece of punk wood, where he could look through the surrounding rains, mists, and fog-openings, thinking how much better off he was than if he hadn't had that snag hollow to float in. He'd been in lots worse driftwood floating predicaments than that! He kind of went to sleep again, and a yell woke him up.

"Ho law-w—Look't that!" some woman was whooping.

The snag had floated over down past an island, where some shantyboat was tied in. Red pulled back in out of sight, but he had to laugh, for he bet that woman was Mrs. Mahna. She'd never get over telling about seeing Red tripping down in a hollow cottonwood. Probably, too, she'd read in a newspaper how the softpaw was lucky

enough to get his shantyboat back, and perhaps exposing Red, or at least his red whiskers as the principle suspect made and provided.

"I better stay floating two, three days," Red reflected. "Them damned sher'f an' police chiefs, an' prob'ly federals, too, is conspirin' to bother the life out of us riveh people."

Red passed Memphis, having a nervous minute because his snag seemed bound to hit into the Hanrahan bridge pier. Then down toward Walnut bend there was a big eddy the snag got into and went round and around like it'd never got out, but some other drift poked in and Red was on his way again.

There't Helena, below the St. Francis mouth he pulled his head down in. Helena, Arkansaw, was one of the places he didn't want to get caught at, the way things were there and out along Crawley's Ridge.

The current was running a good seven to nine miles an hour. That counted up to probably 175 miles a day of twenty-four hours. A man was sure lucky he wasn't set up on foot, getting that far from anywhere he was wanted, or anything. But below Friar's Point, Red sat up astride his hollow cottonwood limb looking around.

"Seems like I'm pretty well stuck in the current!" he shook his head. "Dog-gone, I'd hate to have to swim two-three miles to anywhere. The water's cold; a man'd get all wore out, besides. This old flood's hung center! 'Tain't risin', 'tain't fallin'! That's scatterin' the drift. A south wind'd sure scatter us out around! Plaguey!'

Then he saw a head-rise coming, sure tipping up and swirling the hung-center current. It looked like there'd been a big storm, up the Ohio or Upper Mississippi; it might even be the Missouri was pouring out five or six weeks ahead of time; anyhow, as dusk came, the traveling flood picked up Red's snag and whirled it around and around.

Red noticed something. Along the side of the snag were apples, a bushel or two of winter apples. He whooped. One thing about apples is they're filling. Besides they got flavor. Red gathered several breakfasts, dinners and suppers, and stowed them in a smaller hollow branch where he could get them as needed. Now wasn't that like Old Muddy Gut? Just when Red was beginning to get real hungry, along come those apples!

THERE isn't much variety to a diet of apples, but a lot of corn on the cob, yellow corn, floated down. Probably some farmer lost his crib, but corn has genuine substance. Red didn't favor yellow corn, much. It's all right, fattening hogs, but for real eating a man ought to have white corn off of limestone hills. But yellow corn was a good spread to go with apples. And Red slept real good, even if the bulging up of the head-rise rammed his snag first one way then another. Nothing he could do about it, so he slept nights and looked around for a skiff or something so he wouldn't have to swim ashore.

He slept real good, considering. He'd been coming down six or seven days, and thanks to corn and apples, he wasn't hungry —just anxious for a change. The change came some time during the middle of the night. The snag began to roll, tipping back and forth, and once far enough to half fill the hollow branch where Red was sound asleep. He gave probably the loudest squawk he'd ever let go, for the water was so cold it made him dream enough disaster and excitement for a six-weeks' trip in a Spring Tide—all in about three or four seconds.

There he was, but happily his corn cobs and apples hadn't all washed out. A hollow tree, wet inside, is about the most uncomfortable shelter there is, but Red stood it, somehow. The night was dark and the snag was moving on along, but it wasn't in the middle of Old Mississip'. It was between two stands of tall timber, with the current carrying the snag only the Lord could know where. Once in a while a root at one end or a branch at the other hooked into something, and a quake ran through the snag. Red sat there fuming and cussing — and after a long time daylight broke glowing through the rain clouds which were close down to the tree top canopy.

Red realized what had happened. The big head-rise had raised the Mississippi three or four feet higher than the water back in the swamps, and eddied the tributaries. The snag had floated out of the main river up some bayou, river or side current. No telling which side the river he'd floated out—

whether he was going east or west! Darned old scoundrel Muddy Gut! It just seemed as though Old Mississip' didn't have any system, morals, regularities—anything that didn't have exceptions worse than the usuals.

And when it came daylight, a man couldn't tell where the sun was coming up, the rain clouds were so thick. Moreover, there in the standing timber even a knife blade on a finger nail cast a treacherous shadow, because the tree tops were interfering, the branches beginning to leave out. Of course, if Red had floated far enough away from the main river, anybody happening to pass by in a skiff or launch might not recognize him. If he had only thought to put a hoe-razor, blades and soap in his pocket when he went after that beef he could have shaved, and looked just like anybody else, more or less.

Red ate three corn cobs clean, and then two or three apples. It was sure lucky, those corn cobs had floated a long time, and they were real soaked, soft, and a man didn't wear his jaws all out, chewing. The rain was pouring down. Red pawed out some of the wet punk wood in his hollow branch and snoozed, half wondering where he was floating to, and where he was—what part of the Mississippi Bottoms he was in at. The fog was thick. He'd been coming so long he couldn't be sure where he was, but Helena was in Arkansas and getting toward Louisiana; but perhaps he was up some Mississippi state creek or outflow. Perhaps there'd been a crevasse and he'd floated over into the Yazoo headwaters, somewhere.

Oh, well! It didn't really make much difference; Red knew he was somewhere. And then he noticed some noises off to one side. It was coming dark, and he couldn't see anything. However, by the feel of the air, he knew the weather was changing. Sure enough, when he woke up, the moon was shining. The snag was hesitating. The water was swirling around, the moon and stars were shining. The swamps were filling up. This river was beginning to flow again, down toward the Mississippi. When daylight came Red saw the brick-colored waters. He'd floated up Arkansaw Old Mouth!

Red had to laugh, he felt so confused and comical, not knowing he was there in the Big Island back water. Somehow, floating a few days or a week or so, a man kind-of loses track of where he's at. If he'd just stopped to think he'd recognized the river above Rosedale and might have known, being below Friar's Point that he was come close to White river, Montgomery Chute, Arkansaw New Mouth around the north side of Big Island—and here he was away up above Old Mouth chute.

There'd be a lot of shantyboats tied in down close to Old Mississip'. With just an opportunity and a bit of luck, Red might get a skiff or rag-shack launch. All he needed was a persimmon canoe or skiff, and he'd be all set. Come to look around, the snag was stopped.

A root or a branch had hooked onto the bottom or perhaps a stump in the overflow. And those sounds he had noticed—it was comical how different things are when a man doesn't know where he is at, exactly! There, just over in the brake a ways was a ridge, a long one. On the ridge were a lot of cows, razorbacks, goats, and even four or five disgusted mules, their ears lopped down, the whites of their eyes showing all the way around. A man better keep away from their hind heels!

The hogs, cows and mules had a few deer among them. And reaching from the snag over to the land was a long, slim branch. Red walked out on it, and dropped onto dry land; rather on land above high water. The domestic stock stood dejected, crowded up on that mile-long ridge. A razorback boar rooted in the mud, chanking up roots. A cow stood on its hind legs, browsing green leaves. A mule gnawed some willow bark. The goats stepped around, heads up, sniffy, snorty, big as life.

Beef, pork, goat meat—tons of it! Mash-fed hogs, beef fattened on acorns, pecans, browse—wild flavored! Red licked his chops. He watched boars, mules and bulls, nervously. One big boar with 9-inch tusks lifted his head and turned with a sneering expression in his pig-eyes, showing half a mind to start something; but his hoofs sank into the muck and the exertion needed distracted him. Red, ready to jump back on his snag, knew he was safe when the old razorback, better than four feet tall, merely shrugged and stood still, numb in the Overflow's menace.

"If I'm keerful," Red reflected as he drew

his 7-inch leather-handled sheath knife and touched his thumb along the edge with which he could have shaved, if he had had soap and felt like it. Accordingly, he ambled along, feeling rich and lucky beyond measure, jubilant as only a river rat can feel when fortune smiles on him. With all that beef available, he almost scorned it. What he wanted was pork, a cane-rooter, a roly-poly hog that would weigh forty or fifty pounds and have hard flesh, yet plenty of lard, too. Presently he found a drove of what he sought, thirty or forty black and yellowish cane-rooters, pigs! He had to be right careful. Even water-bound pigs, if they aren't handled right, get spunky and liable to tree a man.

However, Red knew his wildcrafting. He found a two-year-old that lay on its side and was suffering dreams of plenty. With a quick clutch, Red pulled the skin on the slumberer's throat and stuck it. The hog jumped up, the skin slid back over the stab wound and Red scuttled to a tree with low branches, ready to climb. It wasn't necessary. Hardly a drop of infuriating blood had been shed.

The young hog didn't know what had happened. It circled around and then collapsed in eternal sleep. Red slung the carcass over his shoulder and toted it to a pile of rafted drift from whose tangle he gathered firewood and in a few minutes he had a big blaze, started with a match from a waterproof screw-top box.

He dressed out his cane-rooter; he skinned and quartered it; he cut a ham into strips which he hung in the wind to cool it. He was hungry enough to eat his pork sprinkled with ashes, but then he noticed an old, gaunt cow sticking out her long tongue and licking an odd, white lump in the overhang of a hollow tree.

"Lawse, I cain't b'lieve my luck!" Red gasped, but sure enough when he came to the place, there was a 25-pound block of pasture lick salt, clear as a crystal!

All he had to do was knock off a chunk and wash it in the Arkansaw river; then he shaved whittlings off the block-salt edge onto his pork, working the salt into the half-pound strips of meat. Presently he hung the dangles over the bed of coals down to which his driftwood fire had burned. The pork dripped lard, browning in the red heat over the bright coals, sizzling with soft noises.

Red sat licking his chops, his tongue coiling red about his lips and along his teeth, just waiting, restraining his impatience. How come he had ever thought of leaving the Lower Mississippi river bottoms? A man must be kind of loony, sort of off his nut, having ideas like that!

" 'Course, I neveh actually meant to go!" Red excused himself, and when presently the pork was cooked clear through, white as cotton inside,—it doesn't do to eat pork that isn't well done over a hot fire!—Red nicked off the tip of a slab, tossing it from hand to hand to cool it. When he bit into it, the salt had worked in just right, and sound hardwood coals had smoke-flavored the meat perfectly! It was sure eatings, then!

When Red's stomach was rounded out more than it had been for many a day, he was sleepy. The afternoon was waning into a gray sunset. He raised a dry bed of sticks and cane poles off the wet punk in a hollow log and dozed into temporary oblivion and contentment. Then he dreamed of snakes walking on their tails over his face, thick, clammy cottonmouths, and he jumped up, yelling and bumping a calf whose ears he had seized when it reached into the hollow log to lick the salty stains of pork on his whiskers, chin and nostrils.

The moon was shining bright, casting shadows of bare branches of trees on the spreading floodwater and ground. The Overflow had come in many feet over the ridge, narrowing it. The Spring Tide was rising fast.

A LOW, regular throbbing mingled with the other faint notes. Red cherked up, lifting his head, staring alertly. Sure 'nough! There was a power-boat, a gasoline, pounding along out around, somewhere. Red opened his mouth to utter a loud, joyful whoop, but thought better of it. Being marooned by a Spring Tide was better than to be picked up by some scoundrel officials. The put-put drew nearer.

A searchlight shot into the brake. Red ducked. The boat was coming along a bayou lane in the Overflow. Good watermen were navigating that boat, taking their time. Presently, he made out the shadow of a

barge, a big barge. He couldn't see the power-boat, but somebody was holding a big spotlight, watching the water ahead, as the tow came around the island on the Arkansaw river side, and poked bow-on into an opening to land where the livestock were marooned. The island was six inches higher than the water, the only land for miles around. Naturally, the stock owners would come after the animals, soon as they could get a cattle barge. Red could see only three men silhouetted against the pale sky. He sure didn't want to meet any Arkansaw Swamp Angels.

Red had been through those parts and met deputy sheriffs, the regional justice of peace and important citizens, a commissary owner, a timber man, others who had long memories. Red had escaped with a string of rafted saw-timber. No, suh! He positively disliked those Swamp Angels.

The bargemen moored, shoved ashore a landing-stage and rolled out V-chute wire fencing. There were five and they knew their business, herding the livestock aboard. They ran goats up the gangplank and down a ramp into the barge hold, and worked hogs the same way. The deer swam off into the Overflow, alarmed. The beef animals, soothed by low calls, headed aboard, tramping on the booming deck. Three board banisters were along the gunwales and across the bow and stern-railings.

Red ducked and dodged around, hiding in the shadows of brush and tree and stump, trying to make up his mind what to say to those men, excusing himself for being caught on that Overflow island. He could only guess how far it was from anywhere —from ridge, levee or whatever, where a man could reasonably be.

Watching all the operations, Red came to where he could see the outline of the power-boat alongside the big barge hull. It was a squat, heavy-duty motorboat launch. Red sighed with admiration and envy. If there was anything he needed now and would rather have than anything else, it was one of those inboard marine-motor launch outfits, strong enough to do reasonable towing.

"Why, I mout salvage an' tow in a 300-log raft strand!" he whispered. "That'd mean a thousan' dollars—hue-e-e!"

Making sure that all those stock rescuers were engaged in chuting the animals aboard, Red slid into the water, wading carefully till he was beyond his depth, then swam alongside the barge in the shadow, drifting like a big bullfrog, and worked around the stern to get aboard that fascinating launch. Then maybe two twitches and the mooring lines would fall off, two shoves and he'd be in midstream of that wrong-way flowing Arkansaw river current!

He was just too late. One of the men came along the runningboard of the barge and dropped into the launch while the others hauled aboard the landing stage and cast off the bowlines holding the barge to trees and against the ridge bluff-bank. They had cleaned the island and had a barge load of livestock.

Luck favored Red. A stern line loop dangled in reach of the water and he found the tied end, climbing up. He studied the men busy deck-handing at the bow. On his hands and knees, he crept around to the ramp and ducked down into the hold where he found himself among the goats, flocking by themselves. The hogs were up in the bow hold.

"I can git to stay here a spell!" Red reflected. "Hit's a sight better'n waiting on that island, while the water keeps comin' up! One thing about goats, they're warm-blooded. I'd sure get to hard chillin' if'n they want warmin' me up, good! Anyhow, hit's a better chance an' if I was up to my neck in a risin' tide!"

Red listened to the familiar sounds of a blunt, steep-raked barge as the heavy-duty launch shoved it against the Mississippi current coming into the bottoms. Chunks of drift drummed on the planks and rolled thudding along under the barge. The hull strained and vibrated, and by the dry sounds he recognized that this was a newly built craft, a well-found boat of planed lumber, all tight and not leaking a drop. An old boat smells of all its previous cargoes, of cottonseed and molasses, mules and cattle and lumber; this barge was clean with only the fresh odor of livestock aboard for the first time.

"Hit sho' is dandy built!" Red muttered to himself, feeling the side-walls, the smooth hardwood framing, the matched plank decking. In the dark of the hold the only thing he could see was the moonshine on the ramp and the glisten of goats' eyes as they, too,

looked around and blinked suspiciously. Red lurked along the side, around the bulkhead at the bow, and there he found a cord or more of cottonseed meal cakes, strong with the odor of oil and the molasses stickum. The stock feed alarmed him. The towboat crew would be coming down about dawn to feed the hungry animals, which also smelled the cakes and crowded one another to the uprights which barred them from the feast.

Red thrust out a cake about two feet long and eight inches wide. The goats nearest broke it up and ate it. Red gave out a hundred weight or so, and the goats grew quiet, lying down and going to sleep, stomachs full.

The swirl of the Mississippi current gurgled under the bow and along the sides. The ground swells washed into the standing timber and sawing eddies started tall, dry tree trunks to humming with vibration. The jets of current thrust hissing and swashing in eddies along the banks submerged by the flood. Anxiously, Red crept up to where he could listen to the crew running the boat, worried about the notoriously short tempers of livestock owners.

"We betteh make ouh connections theh't Arkansaw City!" a voice declared. "Sooner it's done—"

"Why, shucks, that ain't no market!" another interrupted. "They don't give us a break! They want all the profits—"

"'Sides theh't Arkansaw City theh's plenty got stock tagged up on the Arkansaw riveh bottoms!" a third man added, his voice a whimper.

"I'm f'r drappin' down't to Mendova," a rumbler declared. "'Course, hits takin' chances, trippin' down that far—"

"I bet theh's alarms aout f'r this barge already—" the voice that Red heard first urged. "Pusnally, I like quick action—"

"Watch aout!" a voice ordered, sharply. "This water's sure bad!"

A scampering, quick exclamations and fast work swinging the barge which had been thrown broadside by a big whirlpool jet of current followed, and Red sat blinking, surprised.

"Why, the danged scamps!" he thought. "They ain't owners! They's scoundrels—they's riveh pirates! Why, dad-blasted rascals—huh!"

OFF the river himself Red felt indignant at his alarm and dread. These stock thieves were ornery and shiftless, poachers on his own prerogatives. There were five of the Overflow raiders. They were afraid of an alarm out for the barge. That meant probably it was pirated, same as the livestock. Perhaps the launch towing the barge was picked up, too. Red blinked, puzzled and surprised. He just hadn't even suspected this wasn't a livestock rescue outfit.

"'Course, they handle boats like they know how!" Red reflected. "This'n isn't the firstest time they've rustled swamp beef."

The men were arguing again. They figured whether it was better to get rid of the stock right away for what they could get for it, or take it on down the Lower Mississippi, looking for better prices than meat fences were willing to pay. "Them black markets are same as any crooked buyers!" a voice declared. "They pay less an' they charge more an' they got any right to!" Red knew just how they felt.

A bow watch was sitting on the tow-bitts, looking for sawyers, drift, jeopardies in the moonlighted waters. "Pull over!" he called back in a low, yet curiously penetrating voice. "Current's bearing hard into the timber!"

"That's a sure good motorboat!" Red reflected. "That engine's a humdinger! Runs nice an' quiet—no poundin'—underwater exhaust—plenty power!"

Red found a shadow where he lurked, able to see the water, the trees, the moon, stars and that dark figure silhouetted on the tow-bitts. When the watch lighted a cigarette he cupped his hands and only for two or three seconds did the match head flare red. Red approved.

Steering a tow in the night needs eyes undimmed by sparkles and glows.

Presently Red recognized the course and place on the river. This was down Arkansaw Old Mouth, where the current had eddied and was now pouring toward the Mississippi. The New Mouth, heading into White River above Sibley's at Montgomery Chute, was reversed, still eddying into the Bottoms Overflow.

"These fellers know Old Mississip'!" Red approved. "Besides they're taking the short-cut thisaway! Huh—theh's the shanty-boats!"

MOORED to tree branches were shanty-boats near the Mississippi along submerged Big Island. Most shantyboaters mind their own business. Red didn't know just who was tied in along there. Tom Bierce, Muddy Marshal, Kid Logan—there was the *Laughing Belles,* showboat, and just on beyond was Marcie's whiskey boat. 'Course, Marcie was a distributor, and Revenuers never found nothing on his barge. He had a system of eyebolts along the bottom of his cabin-boat, with trot line staging that held gallon jugs underwater. Red wished he had time for he could have got one of those jugs by swimming there in the night.

Then a dog began to bark. Some river scoundrels don't care who get waked up by those yappy purps. Red had no admiration for dogs.

"If'n a dog ain't the last living thing to have onto a rag shack!" Red thought, shrinking down, awry-eyed at the yipping and its echoes. Some one lit an oil lamp on the whiskey boat. Worse yet, the next minute somebody shot a flashlight beam over the waters, revealing the dark outline of the barge, but a blessed curling up of wisps and harpies of mist was fog a-coming! Red drew slowly down. The man on the tow-bitts didn't move as they were enveloped in a lifting wave of gray mist through which the moon shone and cast shadows of fog on fog.

Red hadn't even hoped for fog, or thought of it. Generally a man doesn't get what he wishes he had down Old Mississip'! Now there it was, gray thickening tufts, spirals and flowing streamers of mist that stopped short the beam of light before it could more than show a patch on the side of the barge. The launch was on the outside, out of sight.

The Old Mouth opened up. The tree tops higher than the fog drew back, the water widening. The barge thrust its square nose forth into the thick gray gloom of the miles-wide Spring Tide between the submerged forests that marked the course of Old Mississip' down into Ozark Bend past Bolivar and on to Arkansaw City.

Red sighed with relief. He was back on the widewater again. A man always feels good, getting back where he belongs! No other water in all the world feels, looks, acts and tastes like that big Muddy Gut! For a minute Red practically forgot he was a stowaway on board this rescue boat. Just while he was enjoying his satisfaction, the sky flushed with a new light and the moon faded. This was dawn. Red held his breath. Any minute, now, he was liable to have questions asked. It was practically certain he'd never be able to answer how come and why and what for?

Red blessed the thickening fog. He'd never seen it thicker. In fact, it was rising and, despite the coming of day, a man could hardly see the length of the barge—which was about a 90-footer, 16 or 18 foot wide and just loaded right down with beef, pork and goat!

THE LAUNCH motor slowed down, geared in neutral, idling. The barge was floating free in the Mississippi flood current. Drift was scattering across the surface, black in the fog if visible at all. Red could sometimes see the crew standing at the stern, talking in the low tones that prevail on boats in fog or at night, the awe of obscurity upon them.

The wide, devastating flood was almost silent. Distant sounds came faintly through the pale, gray gloom. A voice came clearly, but from afar off:

"Post Number 19—an' all's well!"

"Huh—the levee watch!" Red grumbled. "Them fellers don't let nothin' git by them!"

Red had once been commandeered and put to work rushing dirt-filled bags to help build up a weakening levee. That was dog-gone hard work. The barge crew was uneasy. They had a big load to be floating free down the midstream current. If they didn't know the river they could make mistakes — they could get into trouble — they mightn't be able to tell where they were heading, where to land in. The only sure way of telling which way was which was to drop a sounding lead to the river bottom and find out which way they were going—then head cross-wise to find a shore or levee or submerged timber brake. Red sucked a finger, warming it. He held it up, and one side cooled rapidly. That showed which way the boat was going.

"I don't neveh git used to floatin' where I cain't see an' don't know't I'm out-yonder or in a circle-back eddy!" Red shrugged un-

easily. "How'm I goin' to know where at I'd bes' float off?"

No telling when those scoundrels aft would get through consulting and come rambling around, feeding the stock—*Shu-u!* There they broke up and spread out. They had a store of cottonseed-molasses cakes under the stern deck. They brought up armsful. One started a pump and filled the troughs with water. Red shrank back down the ramp and hid himself behind the stored-up feed in the bow. A man came into the gloom and fed the goats, throwing out chunks of the caked-meal. Red escaped notice. He listened to the water pipe quenching the thirst of the livestock. Red drew one of the slugs of roast pork he had hidden to carry under his shirt for just this hour of hunger. Back where he could watch the fog-veiled deck, he munched his lunch, growing anxious, for it was likely a landing would be made almost any time now.

"If'n they only had a skift!" Red reflected. "Than I needn't to depend on them none! 'Course," he hesitated, "Theh's that launch —huh-h—"

He could hardly hope for any such luck as using the launch without permission to make his getaway.

Then a humming sound filled the air. Clanking of metals, the low blasts of distant automobile horns, the noise of a town came through the fog, louder and louder. Red nodded. There was probably Arkansaw City! The beef animals began to moo and the hogs to grunt; the goats began to bleat.

"Dog-gawn, but they're singin'!" Red grumbled, liking noises very little.

Away yonder Red heard a familiar sound, the put-putting of a motor with an open cutout. No other sound, night or day, is commoner down Old Mississip'! Red didn't pay much attention to it at first. He turned his gaze skyward. The fog was thinning. The sun shone down, cutting into the gray, misty layer. There was a levee. There were the roofs and stacks of a 'long-shore city.

There was a big motorboat, a glass-cabin launch, and Red uttered a groan of intense disgust and mental anguish. He knew that boat! It was the Mozart County sheriff's cruiser. Red should have recognized it by the sound of its motor, if he'd been thinking anything. He stooped and dashed along the runningboard aft to where the tow-boat launch should have been—but it was gone.

The barge crew were gone, too. Rearing, Red looked around. The danged, no 'count, mis'able scoundrels were just gliding noiselessly into the bank of fog, keeping the barge between them and that inspection boat which was coming in from the near shore side!

Red gulped, looked into the cold yellow waters where a man would be sure to cramp, probably sink right off, if he dived into it. Even so he tried to make up his mind, and then it was too late. The posse boat swung alongside, bumped and scraped. A deputy vaulted up aboard the barge, caught a rope and made it fast. He dropped one of the lines that had been cast off the towing launch, and it was made fast. A moment later the sheriff's boat was pushing the barge shoreward and Sheriff Barstander was staring, with squinting eyes at Red.

"Well, now what the hell yo' up to, Red?" the officer demanded.

"Why, yo' see, Sher'f, this yeah barge come driftin' up the Arkansaw, Old Mississip' havin' hit eddied. I seen hit was a-drif' so I poled out onto a sawlog—where I was onto that long ridge above Big Island. I got me that handyline, coiled at the bow over't the ridge an' eased the barge up ag'in the ridge. I seen the barge'd tore loose, so I made hit fast. Then the Arkansaw set down, turned Old Mississip' back, so I hated to leave all these yeah cows, goats, hogs on the ridge. I jes' naturally run down the gangplank—hyar they be! Water was just overflowin' the island. I hated to leave 'em drowndin'."

"Red, I think that's jes' anotheh of yore damned lies!" the sheriff scowled. "You was goin' right on down!"

"I wa'nt nuther!" Red protested. "Theh I was, drappin' right down along of the Arkansaw City eddy. If'n yo'd minded yo' own business, I'd floated off the risin' head tide an' come into the reverse current. All I'd had to do was drap the handyline onto one of them boom cleats or onto the coal-barge fleet. Theh I'd be'n, sittin' purty. Lots of thanks a man gits, salvaging cattle-stock from the Overflow—huh!"

"Salvage—that's right, Sher'f!" A large man with a goatee, a wide black hat and long black coat, wearing knee-high leather boots, spoke in. "When one of these riveh

rats brings out a load as big as this'n, he's got salvage—"

"Why, damn hit! I bet this scoundrel was headin' fo' the black market, Col. Sibley!" Sheriff Barstander objected. "This yeah's Red—"

"I neveh in gawd's world stole beef 'en hawgs 'en goats—all to once!" Red declared angrily. "I leave hit to anybody if'n I was eveh caught herdin' out cows, a flock of goats—a whole load of razorbacks! I'd done betteh if'n I'd sunk this damned old barge—"

RED blinked, self-pitying. These fellows were fixed to railroad him. They'd accuse him of grand larceny, when he'd never done anything but meanness, felonizing, and nobody eveh knowed him to get out of the petty larceny class. Well, now they had him dead to rights, when he was just plumb innocent.

"I tell yo' this yeah's a black market load!" the sheriff urged. "This Red done cut loose this barge where yo' built hit up White Riveh, an' he loaded hit some'rs in the swamp brake—"

Colonel Sibley shook his head. He knew river rats.

"Outside of prob'ly killin's, I don't reckon Red eveh did no felonies," Sibley said. "He'd kill a hawg, a calf, jes' for eats. Anyhow, he saved my barge an' that's my stock. If'n he goes before the Federal Commissioner, claiming salvage, he'll git plenty. Yas, suh, plenty! I reckon I betteh placate him, 'stead of antagonizin'. Red how'd a century look to you—ten of these here 10-spots?"

Red was speechless. Luck is the darnedest thing, down Old Mississip' he'd leave it to anybody! Col. Sibley counted down the $10 certificates. He wrote out a receipt, acknowledging loading, navigating, and delivering the *Tupelo Gum,* a barge, and beef, pork and goats, and receiving $100 in full payment for salvage, rescue and labor. Then Sibley turned the fountain-pen-handle to Red, who seized it, hesitating a moment, considering what name to sign; then he wrote with a flourish:

Red Rufus, Esq.

Red took the currency, shuffled it even with a grand air, and looked around. It's always best to move away, quickly, after a job is done. The sheriff grimaced, and indicated a fisherman's square-stern flat-bottom skiff, about 18 feet long, apparently in good condition.

"Theh's a skift we fished out the drift this mo'nin'!" the sheriff said. "Take hit an' git!"

Red blinked. Wonders never cease. He glanced at the sheriff, stared at Col. Sibley, as if he just wasn't so, and looked around, making sure he hadn't gone crazy floating on that long snag, and all that Overflow Ridge was just a prank of imagination, dreaming, or something. With a rush, he boarded the skiff, taking the painter with him, shoved off the levee and caught up the oars, rowing. The sheriff watched him go, his eyes baleful, his manner resentful—Red was worth $100 most anywhere!

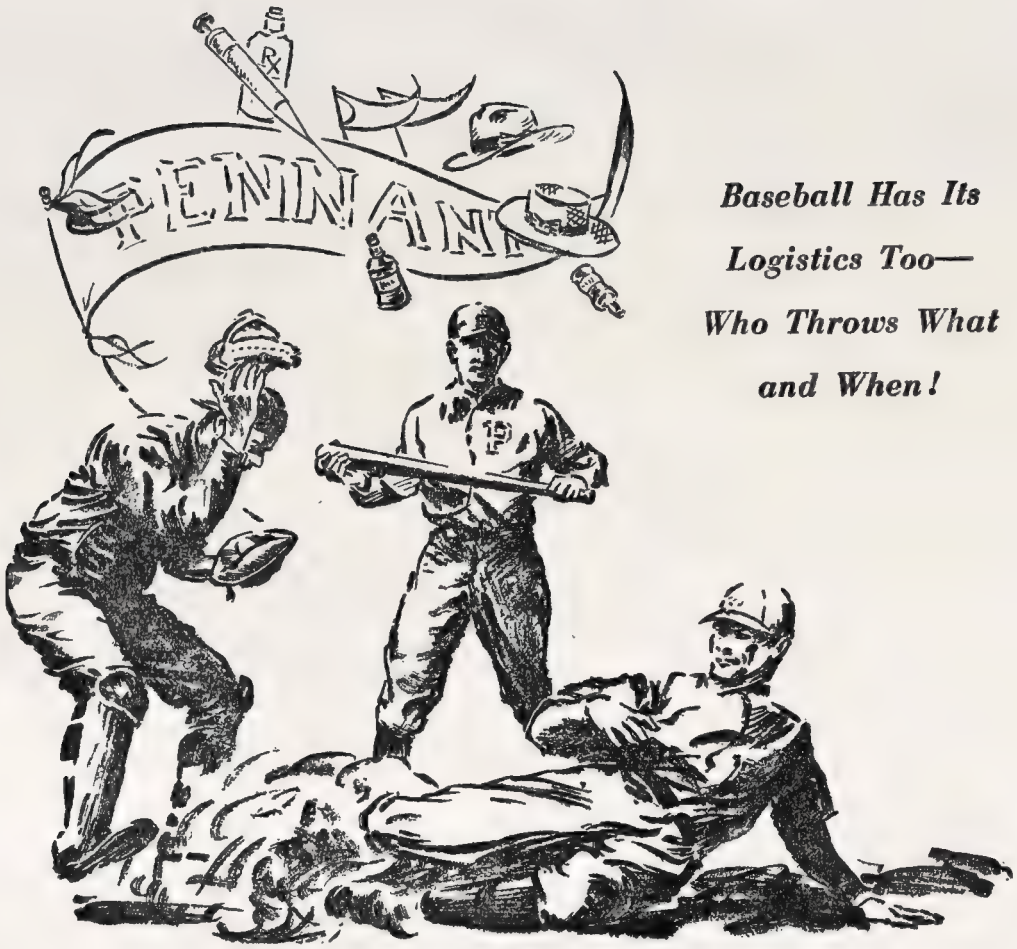
"Don't neveh come back!" the county authority yelled, growling.

" 'Course not!" Red grinned, fervently, and crossed the reverse current swirls into the main flood of unbelievable Old Mississip'.

"My lan', but wa'nt I lucky!" Red sighed, when he was out of gunshot and practically out of sight below Arkansaw City Bend. "A hundred simoleons! *Shu-u!* I won't have to do nothin' more, this high water!"

He sat huddled up, hands clasped across his shins, floating free. At intervals he shook his head, remembering he had thought, and even said out loud that he'd quit Old Mississip'! That just showed what a plaguey old torment Old Muddy Gut was, annoying, tricking, bothering, abusing, confusing, disturbing a man! Red sighed, grimacing, glaring downstream, amazed and relieved. He had actually slipped through the hands of that sheriff at Arkansaw City—the Mozart County authority!—and got away not only with $100 cash, but he'd even evaded getting took up for rewards up and down the Lower River. There are some things a man can't never account for, the way it is in this gawd-awful world!

" 'Course, I never actually meant I'd really get to quit Old Mississip', cold and scornful!" Red assured himself. "Why, shucks, a man'd be jus' plumb foolish, cross-tyin' his luck, thataway!"



Baseball Has Its Logistics Too— Who Throws What and When!

A Pitcher's Got to Throw

By C. HALL THOMPSON

HERE I am, minding my own business, happy as a bug in a rug with my beer and salami-on-pumpernickel at Kindy's, when in waltzes Charley Budd. Not that I got anything against Charley, you understand. Far from it, he's my best friend. Only, here of late, Charley is what you would call a guy with a one-track mind. Every ride you take on the Budd Special you end up getting an ear-beating about a new kid named Lou Farrell, a kid with a million-dollar left arm, and a nice, honest grin.

Now, the first time, you don't mind hearing about this Farrell guy, and how damned good he is, and how he's got Bob Feller and Lefty Grove up an alley, pitching pennies. But, like I say, when you see Charley maybe ten times a day, not counting meals at the clubhouse, it gets kind of like a broken record.

I scrooched down in my metal-backed chair and got ready to shut off the listening apparatus, soon as I got wind that Budd was shifting off-course to his favorite subject. He came across the low, cool taproom; it was shadowy and nice compared to the steam-heat of the sun outside. Charley's large bony head was sweating a little, so that those bald spots by the temples were kind of shiny. The big guy was getting old.

He sat down and called for a beer. The

fat boy behind the bar brought a dribbling schooner, and grinned at Budd. Charley wasn't grinning back; he was glum. In fact, he was in a hell of a mood, and I knew why.

"Where you been?" I said.

"Down the park."

"You work out today?" He nodded and guzzled beer. "How's the arm. Feel any kinks. . . ?"

"It'll do," Charley said.

"You gotta be in damn good shape. There's some heavy hitters on this Washington set-up. And you know the pen . . ."

"Yeah, I know. The pennant depends on taking them."

"Well, don't sound so down-in-the-mouth about it," I told him. "Ain't every hurler gets himself a spot like you got. The club only half a game off the pace, you on the mound. Fritzie's got a lot of faith in you. . . ."

FRITZ MOSEBY. That's the little fat guy that manages our club; maybe you seen him in the papers lately. He was in a few of them old-time pictures with Charley and a few of the others.

"More than he's got in Farrell," Charley said. I blinked at him, and began to close the ear-shutters. Here it came again.

"Have another beer, Charley," I sighed. I waved to the fat guy, making a V with my fingers. He brought two more.

"I tell you this Farrell kid's good, Joe," Budd said to me. "He's got everything I had in the old days . . . and a hell of a lot more. . . ."

"Sure. Don't we know what he's got?"

"You ought to . . . Fritz ought to. You seen him play . . . you seen him hurl that game against Pittsburgh. Damn near a no-hitter that was . . . I couldna held 'em any better. . . ."

"I know," I admitted. "Sure, Farrell's good. . . ."

"Then, why don't Fritz give him this set-up against Washington. He could do it. He'd make them look like ten-pins in a bowling alley with that curve. . . ."

"He ain't had enough time. He's still rough on the edges."

"Rough, hell. He's smooth. . . . I know, I trained him. I been behind the plate at practice. . . ."

"Look, Charley," I cut in. "What're you tootin' your horn for Lou Farrell, for? This is your game. You crazy?"

"No. . . . Not crazy. . . . I'm a little tired maybe." Budd ran a hand over his face and grinned sheepishly. He looked at his left hand and arm. "There ain't a hell of a lot left in that old pin," he said. "I keep trying to tell people. . . ."

"Nuts!"

"No, I ain't kiddin', Joe. It's the old baseball story. Guys come up fast and they do all right but you got just so many ball games in you. Then you go down. Maybe I want to make sure I leave my place to the right guy . . . a guy that can do the same as me . . . and maybe better. . . ."

"And you think Farrell's the guy?"

"I know he is. I don't think, Joe. I know. . . ."

I shook my head.

"Maybe," I said. "But, he ain't ripe, yet. . . ."

"You been listenin' to Fritz too much." He scowled at his beer. "Look, Joe. You been around. A scout knows when he sees good material. You gonna sit there and tell me Lou ain't good material?"

"We been over that before," I argued. "I tell you, he ain't ready. Besides, why pick on me? It's up to Fritz. He's the boss." Charley just looked at me for a while then he shrugged impatiently.

"What's the use?" He muttered.

All the same, later, when we went back to the park, he was still batting the subject around. I gave up listening and arguing. I just said "Yes" and "No" at the proper intervals, and the ones that couldn't be answered that way I kept quiet about. I didn't like going out of the oasis of Kindy's into the broiling mid-day sun with the rest of the mad dogs and Englishmen, but I'd told Fritz I would be around to give the club the once over, and to view a couple of hopefuls he had lined up for next season.

We went in through the rear gate and Pop Dingler gave Charley a wink and said something about taking Washington with both hands tied behind him. We walked through the clubhouse, and up the ramp, into the dugout. Fritz Moseby was squatting on one of the benches, chewing a cigarette. He was sweating like hell.

"Where you been hidin'?" he growled at me.

"Down to Kindy's. You got the new stars of tomorrow on hand. . . ."

"They've worked out already. You can see them the next time." Fritz warmed to his subject. "Ya know, Joe, one of these babies is a beaut. A natural shortstop if I ever seen one. . . ."

"There y'are," Charley Budd complained to nobody in particular. "You look at that kid and tell me he ain't top hole. . . ." The tone of his voice was I-dare-you. His marble eyes were squinted against the sun green of the diamond, watching the long, limber bag of bones on the mound.

A scout gets to see a lot of ball players and I had to admit it; this Farrell bohunk was it. He had a hell of a lot more on the ball than spit, and you liked to see him out there in the box. He had style; he was a showman. Charley was right. This boy would have been a double for him in his biggest days, quite a few years back.

"Like I was sayin'," Moseby cuts in, ignoring Budd. "This shortstop, Joe. We got to use him next season. A little bit of sand-paperin' on those rough corners and he'll be. . . ."

"All right," Budd said. "Don't listen to me. Ignore me."

"Whatsa matter with him?" Moseby asked, innocent like.

I shrugged. This wasn't my party.

"As if you didn't know," Charley plunked down on the bench and began to take the makings out of his pocket. He rolled a smoke with long sunburned fingers.

"Charley thinks you oughta give Farrell a shot of the big meat tomorrow."

Moseby eyed me, then Budd, then me again.

"He's screwy," he said finally.

"The kid's good," Charley repeated stolidly.

"All right," Moseby said. "So, who's arguing. . . ? But, he's not good enough to risk a pennant on. . . . You are. . . . At least I think you are. . . ."

CHARLEY set fire to his cigarette.

"You feelin' all right?" Fritz asked suddenly. "You sick or something."

Budd told him. "Look, Fritz, why don't you listen to me, once and a while. Farrell can take this thing tomorrow, one-two-three, and you'll have a newspaper headliner on your hand. . . . Me, I'm not so sure about. . . ."

"I'm takin' the risk on you," Moseby replied tight-lipped. "You just take care of your hay-fever, that's all. . . ."

"How is the hay-fever?" I said.

"Pretty good," Charley said. "Ain't bothered me much this year. . . ." There for a while, last season, his sneezing had had us worried, but a few injections had cleared it up. "But, look, about Lou. . . ."

"Hell!" Moseby exploded. "Will you shut up. . . . I know what I'm doing. . . . I know. . . ." He calmed down. His eyes narrowed. He put a finger against Budd's thick chest and emphasized each word he spoke with a little jab. "Look. . . . I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll leave it up to Farrell. What he says goes. . . ." He didn't wait for Charley's answer. He called out the kid's name.

The lanky guy on the mound looked in our direction, then threw his glove in the box. He came over slow and sure, like some cowboy in a western. He grinned at me with that wide open face of his. He slapped Charley on the shoulder, and I saw this funny, proud light come into Budd's eyes.

"What you want, Mister Moseby?" Farrell said.

"Got a proposition for you kid," Moseby said. "Charley, here, wants you should take his place tomorrow. . . ."

The kid's eyes and mouth widened simultaneously.

"Take his place? You mean pitch? Against Washington. . . ?" He turned to Budd. "Whatsa matter Charley you sick . . .?"

"No. . . . 'Course not. . . ."

"He wants you should have the chance to show what you got." Moseby's eyes narrowed more. "He's goin' to give up the honor of winnin' the pennant to give it to you. . . ."

"Now, wait a minute." Farrell grinned and shook his head, the same slow way he walked. "I can't do that, Charley. You got a right to that, yourself. . . . Hell, no. . . . I couldn't do that on ya. . . ."

I saw Charley glare at Fritz and I knew he was wise to how the fat little guy had twisted things to suit himself. He didn't say anything. Moseby shrugged, some good-nature coming back into his crafty little face.

"You see how it is, Charley. . . . The kid wants you to do it yourself. . . ." He winked at me, but I didn't wink back. "You see how it is. . . ."

"Hell, no," Farrell wagged his head. "I couldn't do a thing like that. . . . Don't you worry, Charley. I'll get my chance. . . . I'll. . . ."

"Sure, kid," Charley said softly. "Sure, you will."

That was all. He didn't look at Moseby again. He just mumbled something about taking a shower, and he walked away. I watched him go down the few steps and along the ramp. All of a sudden I couldn't help being reminded of another lefty—fifteen years ago. Then the shadows beyond the bright scalpel of the sun swallowed him.

I DIDN'T get a look-see at Charley Budd the rest of the day. He wasn't around for supper, and once or twice during the night somebody asked for him. I could see Moseby was a little worried about the whole mess, but after all you wouldn't blame him. A guy whips a team into shape, he's got a pennant practically in his mitts, and then something like this comes up. He only does the thing that seems safest.

Only the guys that mix in the sports-pages are pretty funny guys. You tell them they're sentimental and they'll paste you all over the floor. But, just the same they are. Maybe, they're like army men, that way. A group of guys are together for a long time, and they get to know each other inside out. Like I say, try and tell them they're soft. You couldn't make them believe it, no matter what you did; but you know it inside you, when you're there along with them, the way I was. You hear them singing old songs like Mother Machree and On The Banks of the Wabash, and you see a guy sitting in one of the club easy chairs with a book in front of his face. If you took the book away, his eyes would be shining, and he'd swear like hell at you for finding him out.

There was this pride between Charley Budd and the kid. It had been Budd who'd been pushing Fritz on the kid from the beginning when Lou had come up from a bush team in God-knows-where. Charley had talked himself blue in the face until he wore Moseby thin. He'd spent a hell of a lot of time setting the kid up, showing him every trick there was to know. You'd think it was father-and-son stuff, some people said. Budd was never married, and maybe this was his way of filling in the empty space, others reasoned.

Anyway, I knew this had hit him pretty hard. I guess, all along, he'd thought he could convince Moseby in the end. God knows he tried hard enough. Only Fritzie knew what he wanted. He had seen Charley pour strikes over the dish for years and he knew he could depend on the veteran. He wasn't taking any chances on a dream-boy, no matter how many complexes were involved.

Charley didn't come in until after two in the morning. Moseby had waited up a while, then finally gone to his room. I sat in the hotel bar. Charley came in and ordered a drink. I went up and sat beside him.

"Moseby's worried about you," I said. "Thought you walked out. . . ."

"Forget it," Charley said. "It's all right." He drank his glass empty and slapped my knee. "Everything's going to be all right. . . ."

I went up to bed mulling that one over, but I couldn't make head or tail of it, so I slept on it. My mind wasn't any clearer when I woke. I wasn't looking forward to the day. The newspapers had been laying heavy odds in our favor and they were all putting their steaks on Charley Budd. Only, they didn't know what was going on inside him, or maybe the best of the bets would've gone the other way.

Moseby and him avoided each other. They didn't fight or anything. I guess both of them knew it would make the rest of the guys shaky to see the king-pins squabbling. All the same, there was a tenseness in the air that you couldn't forget about. I ate my breakfast down at Kindy's, and missed the ham and eggs at the club, so you know how much I wanted to get away from that dreary atmosphere.

YOU KNOW too, if you read Grantland Rice and Lanse McCurley and the others, how things turned out that day. I wish we could've read those headlines beforehand; it would have saved a lot of sweating blood. I went out to the park, not

knowing what to expect. The locker room was dead as hell. There was a smell of sweat and flesh. Nobody did much talking and those who did kept it strictly underground. I don't know what Farrell made of it all; he didn't say anything. I guess he knew what was going on, and he thought if he opened his mouth he'd only make things worse.

Fritz gave them a pep-talk before we went out, but it fell flat on its face. The guys kept looking Charley's way and expecting an outburst. There wasn't any. I almost wished there had been. It would have been better than the waiting. They marched out as though the square of dappled sunlight that led onto the field was the little green door in Sing Sing. Moseby looked at me and shook his head.

The sun was blistering; there was a haze of heat rising from the ground, and Pop Dingler's new-limed lines were cool and precise-looking. There was plenty big noise when the club came out. Washington was already out, and had been working for some time. They looked damn good. I was feeling glum and wishing I was back in Kindy's and the damn thing was over. I sat down beside Fritz and said:

"You think he'll blow?"

"How do I know?" Moseby grunted.

I didn't say any more; at best Fritzie was a rotten conversationalist, and he was in no mood for idle chit-chat now. I watched Charley select his glove and go out there on the diamond. There was a pretty good reception. The tall gray stands were jammed with white shirts and gay dresses that yelled, "Yea, Budd. . . . Go get 'em, Charley." He didn't seem to notice them any. In the mound he eased up a bit. One of the first ones went wild and I saw Fritz tense. I told him it was only practice. Then, the ump hollered: "Play ball!"

WATCHING them first innings was like listening to the Inner Sanctum; you never knew what was coming next. None of us knew how Charley was going to act. I saw Lou Farrell sitting on the edge of the bench with a worried expression on his long horse-face. But, Charley held them. Those first two rounds were honeys. He was like a main spring, winding and letting go. The Washington boys couldn't even see the ball. Moseby began to relax and some of the guys in the dugout even got to cheering. We didn't score either, but that could come later.

It wasn't until the third that Budd started to slow down. One heavy hitter got a double out of him, and he had to walk another. Fritz looked at me and scowled. I looked at Farrell. He was twisting his glove in great bony fists. When Charley came in to the dugout between innings, Moseby went over to him.

"You all right?"

CHARLEY looked up. "I'm okay," he said evenly.

"What the hell happened out there?"

"They didn't score," Budd said. "Don't let it worry you. I'm all right. . . ."

And he blew his top in the fourth. The mob went haywire. A single, a double into the corner, and then a sweet bunt that Charley muffed. There was a run in. Moseby chewed a cigarette and said: "What the hell. . . ." You could almost see Budd sweating out there. This was no fake; this was no put-up job. He was really trying to get 'em past the plate, and he couldn't. I don't know even yet how he managed to retire the side. He moped back heavily and we met him out by the bat-rack.

"Listen, bohunk, if you blow this. . . ." That was as far as Moseby got. Charley was holding his arm gently and there was real pain in his face. It was swollen up like a toy balloon. We just stared.

"What happened?" I gasped.

"Must've thrown my arm out," Charley told me.

"Better get to a doctor," Fritz ordered. All his anger was gone. He was the manager, now, the leader of his flock. And one of them was hurt.

"I'll be all right," Budd interrupted. "I'll stay and see the game. . . ." He walked back to the dugout. I went with him. I saw Moseby hesitate, then go over to Lou Farrell and talk in a quiet voice. Lou came over and said he was sorry as hell.

"Nuts," Charley snapped, gruffly. "Just you remember what I taught you, son. . . . That's all you gotta do. . . ." He looked from Farrell to Moseby to me, and grinned. Nobody said anything. The next inning they made the announcement over the field

mike and the crowd moaned. Farrell went in.

They didn't moan when Lou Farrell came out; they was too busy throwing pop-bottles and hats in the air. They was too busy yelling their heads off. I don't need to tell you what happened that day. All you got to do is look it up in the books. All the sports-pages ran banner heads. ROOKIE HURLER TAKES PENNANT, one of them said. Most of them ran along the same line. Farrell held them to one fluke hit for the last five innings. I thought the guys in the dugout would go crazy. The final score was 4 to 1, and we marched off with the championship in our hip pockets and Lou Farrell on our shoulders. Even Moseby was so happy he wrung Budd's bad hand, forgetting about the arm. There were tears in Charley's big, calm eyes. And, then, they say there are no more sentimentalists.

But most of that was in the papers. What you don't know about is what happened that night at Kindy's. Nobody knows about that, yet, and maybe I can make things clear if I'm the first one to tell the whole story from the beginning to end. I hope I can make it simple enough; I hope I can make people understand about Charley Budd.

WE WERE at Kindy's raising the roof: we had a sea-food supper and drinks all around and all kinds of toasts. Me and Charley and Farrell was at the piano with Ike Harris playing. This Farrell kid is a nice tenor and we made a pretty fair trio. We sang the old ones because they was good for harmony. You know, I Care Not For The Stars That Shine, and The Bells Are Ringing For Me and My Gal. . . . The oldies. Everybody was feeling fine. I went over to the bar to get another drink between songs, and I saw Fritz come in through the swinging glass doors. He motioned that he wanted to see me. I called to Budd and Lou that I'd be right back, and followed him into a back room. He flopped on a chair. There was a look on his face that wiped the smile from mine.

"Whatsa matter?" I said.

"I was just up to see the Commission," Moseby said. "They called me. . . ."

"The Commission?" I said.

"They're thinking of dropping Charley. They're threatening to blackball him, send him back to the minors. . . ."

"I don't get it. . . ."

"You know what that damn fool did?" Moseby's voice was gentle even when he swore; you could see it hurt him. "You know what he did, Joe. He went out to three different doctors. He got three injections. . . . one for hay-fever . . . two for anti-tetanus. . . . He told 'em he'd cut his foot, and was afraid of infection. . . . He took the needles in the left arm. . . ."

"You mean . . . that's what caused the swelling. . . . That. . . ."

"You got it. . . ."

"But why do they want to break him?"

"There might be scandal; they might say he tried to blow the game so Washington could cop the pennant. . . . They might say he was paid off. . . ."

"Yeah," I reasoned. "But, you know why he did it. . . . You know he did it to give Farrell a break. . . ."

"Sure and hell I know it," Moseby rumbled. "But, who's going to believe a crazy story like that . . . ? It's no good, Joe. . . ."

"But, if they send him back, it may ruin him. He may never be able to come up again. . . ."

For a long while Moseby just looked at me and I saw his eyes glistening. We didn't say any more. We both knew I was right, but there was nothing to do about it. I shifted my feet. I was closest to Charley.

"You want I should tell him?" I murmured.

"Somebody has to. It won't be so hard to take from you, Joe. . . ."

"Yeah. . . . Sure. . . ." I turned and opened the door a little. I still had the beer in my hand, but the froth was all gone. I set it on the table at Fritz's elbow and went out and closed the door.

I DON'T know what I did then. I remembered a lot of crazy things, and I saw a guy stepping down from a pedestal to give his place to another kid. I saw him breaking himself because he had faith in a lanky goon with an honest smile. I went over and stood by the piano with Farrell and Charley. Soon as they saw me, they wanted to sing again. Ike played a lead-in, and I tried the melody. "Gee, But I'd Give The World to

See That Old Gang of Mine, I Know I Never Can Forget That Old Quartet That Sang Sweet Adeline . . . Good-bye Forever, Old Sweethearts and Pals. . . ." I don't know how I ever got through it. Every word stuck in my gullet.

After that, I mumbled some excuse and got away. I guess I should've told Charley right then, but he looked so damned happy and proud with his arm around Lou's shoulders. I went away and I got to another place where the lights were dim and the liquor was raw. I had some idea I ought to get stinko and forget the whole thing. But, I knew I couldn't. I'd keep remembering, and, in the end, I'd go back and tell Charley Budd how it was for him. But I kept worrying about his face when I say the words, and I felt lousy.

Even a man's best friend, a guy who knows him, knows the worst about him and still likes him, isn't much good at a time like this. I get rehearsing to myself.

So what if I go over and say, "Charley, I understand, anyway. You've squared up for all those shenanigans in the old days. Plenty guys act crazy when they're on the young side and it doesn't matter now that a lot of people didn't understand, including your own sister. Sure it's tough, Charley, to get told off to stay away from your own nephew who begins to act like a Christy Mathewson right outta the crib.

"But you came back, Charley. The name was Budd now—but the arm was the same—that's what counts—and the heart! And of course that kid nephew of yours, he just naturally found his way to a baseball diamond."

The speech curdled even before I got finished thinking it through. Still, I was elected. . . .

I MOISTENED my lips as I walked over towards the piano. Would it help any to mention I'd seen his sister sitting back of third, looking mighty pleased about young Farrell's showing? I didn't know and there was moisture in my eyes as I laid a hand on Charley's arm.

He turned, looked at me and grinned. I thought, you're old, all right, Charley. Too old to take something like this. And I'm the guy to stick the knife in. I pulled him outside where we were alone. And I told him everything. Spilling it out quick so the pain would be sharp, short.

Then there was nothing but the singing coming out soft and sad from Kindy's. I thought why doesn't the old lug say *something*, curse or take a swing at me—why *doesn't* he?

But Charley just stood there, still grinning. Then he said, abrupt like, "Don't worry, Joe, the Commission won't be heavin' me."

I must've jumped like an airedale pup at that but I still had my doubts.

Charley went on, drawling, taking his time the way he does. "You thought I was kiddin' you a while back about my arm, Joe. I was leveling. I've known the old wing was shot for quite a while. I couldn't pitch a decent nine innings if my life depended on it. One, two, maybe three innings and then. . . ." Charley drew his finger across his throat.

"How could I tell Fritz, though. Besides we were driving for a pennant. Wouldn't help the rest of the boys to find out the old workhorse had pulled up lame. No, Joe this was the only way. Otherwise Moseby wouldn've left me in thinking I'd settle down. We'd have been sunk.

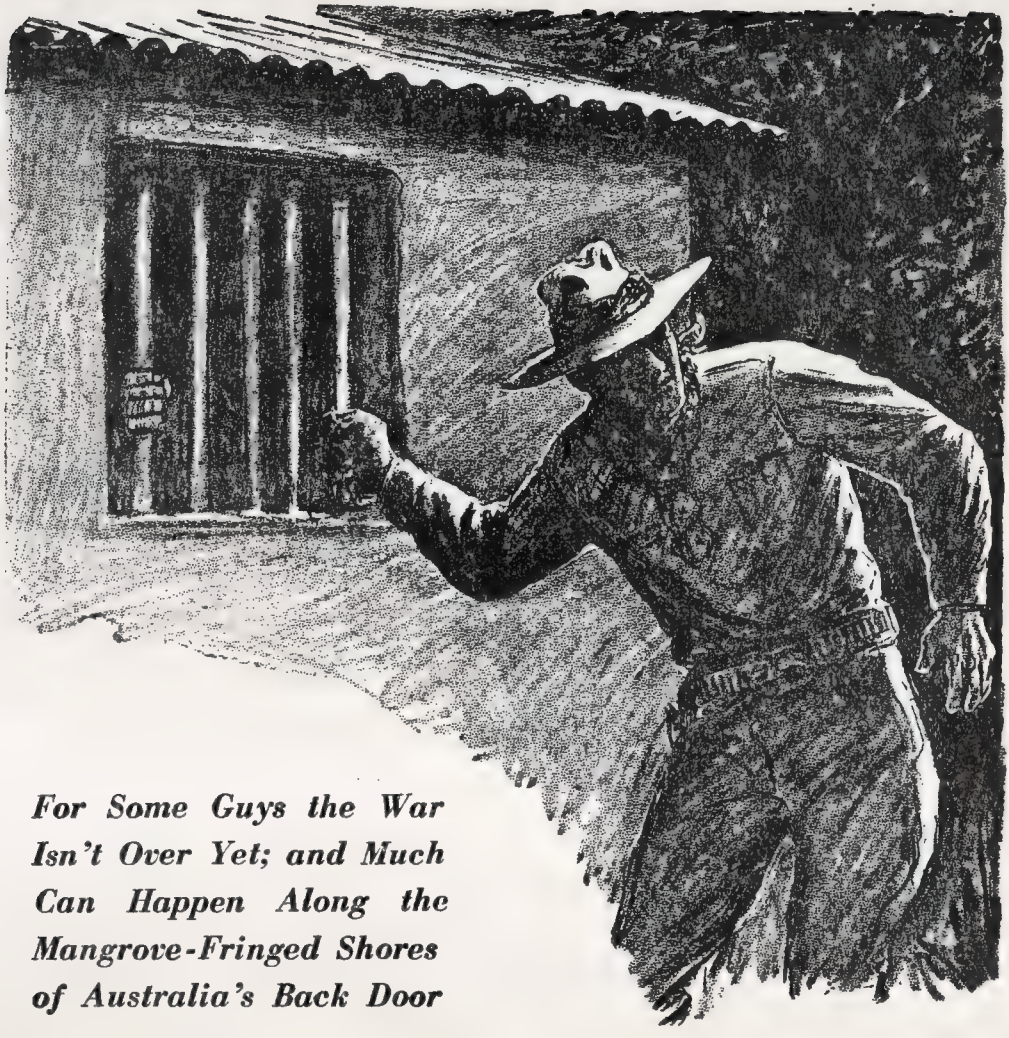
"And I knew Farrell could do it," he added almost as an afterthought.

I almost jumped on Charley in eagerness. "That arm business, will it hold up? You got a doctor who'll go to bat for you before the Commission?"

Charley laughed at me. "Take it easy, Joe. Yeah, this is straight. Hell, I got three docs—count 'em—who know I'll have to do my pitching righty from now on."

We went back into Kindy's arm and arm and the sun was shining again all inside my brain. Why there was plenty of spots a guy like Charley could fit in the big time—scout, coach, manager, lots of places.

And I knew there were going to be some reunions for the old guy. And not with any minor leagues!



For Some Guys the War Isn't Over Yet; and Much Can Happen Along the Mangrove-Fringed Shores of Australia's Back Door

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

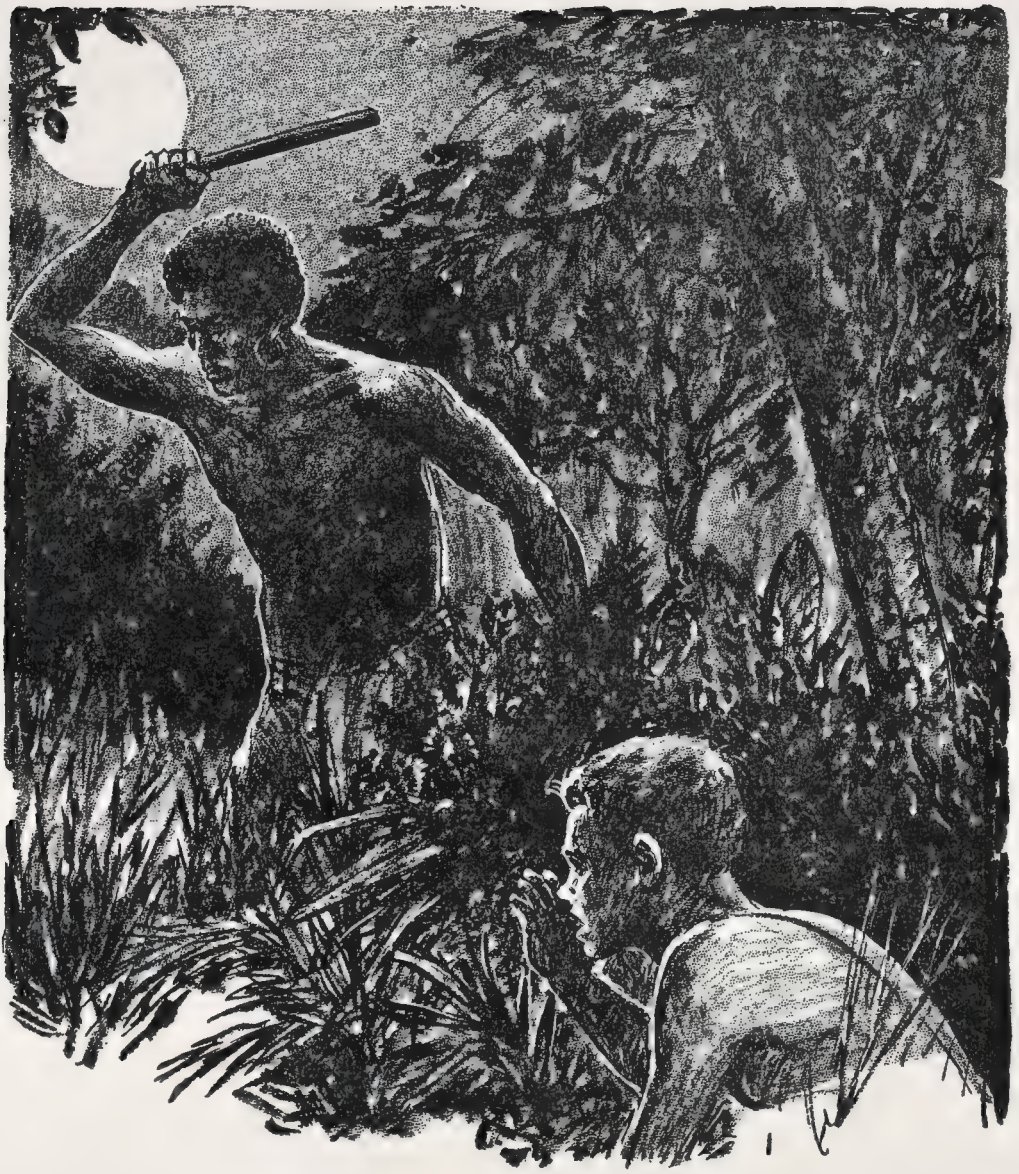
By NEIL MARTIN

TO Frisco Ed McKinney, the sight of the dead horse was like a physical blow. The animal lay half hidden in the tall grass, a spear shaft protruding from its left side, its saddle and bridle still in place, although the hindquarters were missing. But more significant than the mutilated carcass was the battered felt hat lying on the ground beside the tiny spring that bubbled from the base of the limestone bluff.

Wordlessly, McKinney lifted the hat and stared at the initials "W. T." inscribed in indelible ink on the leather sweatband. His knees trembled, and he sat limply down on the forepart of the butchered horse and stared up at the crest of the bluff, which seemed to waver in the shimmering forenoon heat.

"Poor old Bill!" he muttered. "It's his hat, all right."

He shivered as he looked apprehensively about him, his right hand hovering close to



the butt of his holstered Webley. On all sides, the tropical bush of North Queensland closed in like a dense wall, deceptively green, even in the dry season, clamorous with the whistling of parrots, the screeching of cockatoos and the trilling of magpies.

"It doesn't seem right," McKinney growled resentfully. "Bill always got along well with myalls."

To him it seemed incredible that his old partner could have been bushed by wandering blackfellows. Only a few days before they had conversed over the telephone, McKinney in Chillagoe, Tuck in the tiny mining settlement of Yapullun, deep in the heart of the McIlwraith Range, agreeing upon a rendezvous at this very spot.

The realization that myalls might still be lurking in the surrounding bush brought McKinney to his feet. Walking over to his browsing horse, he tethered the animal to a sandalwood tree, then unstrapped his .30-30 carbine from the saddle. The condition of the carcass of Tuck's horse indicated that the animal had been killed within the hour, for those industrious bush scavengers, the bull ants, had not yet started work. Also, the fact that the dingoes were still keeping

their distance seemed to suggest that someone besides himself might still be in the vicinity of the spring.

Moving cat-footed, he slipped into the spear grass. He found a number of beaten paths, which he recognized as wallaby runs. Tuck's assailant might have used any one of these, and thus have avoided leaving his own trail.

Somewhere in the bush a dingo yapped. McKinney froze in the shadow of a towering black bean tree, his eyes probing the surrounding bush. So still was he that a tiny wiree alighted on a bramble a few inches above his head, preened its chocolate-hued plumage, warbled a few notes and then flew leisurely away. Glancing toward the foot of the bluff, McKinney stiffened in anticipation when he saw a quinine bush tremble. Quietly, he brought his carbine to his shoulder and sighted on the spot.

Instead of the bushy head of an aborigine showing among the quinine scrub, he saw a reddish-brown animal resembling an Alsatian dog creep from behind a bush. McKinney's horse heaved back on its tether and blew through its nostrils in sudden fear. Ignoring the frightened horse, the dingo moved slowly up the boulder-strewn slope to a ledge a hundred feet above the ground and crept toward one of the caves which pitted the gray face of the elevation. Pausing outside the cave, the wild dog uttered a sharp bark. Immediately, four more dingoes emerged from the spear grass and scrambled eagerly after the leader.

Aware of what this might mean, McKinney dashed to the foot of the bluff, clambered upward to the ledge and raced toward the cave, with the ravenous snarls of the dingoes dinging in his ears. Pausing outside the opening, he pressed the trigger of his carbine and sent a bullet screaming through the cavern. With frightened yelps, the dingoes erupted from the cave, tumbled pell-mell down the slope and vanished in the spear grass.

McKinney's heart beat faster as he stepped inside the cave and looked apprehensively about him in the half-light. Relief flooded him when he saw lying on the rubble-strewn floor the dripping hindquarters of the butchered horse.

"Christopher!" he muttered. "This gets screwier all the time."

Puzzled, he stepped outside and looked down over the brooding bush, his gaze following the line of red gums marking the course of the dry creek whose brush-filled bed he had crossed half an hour before. The creek meandered through the scrub and wound across open grassland toward a narrow belt of dark green marking the mangrove forests bordering the shores of the Gulf of Carpentaria. Far to the northwest, a thin column of smoke hung lazily in the still air.

McKINNEY'S weather-tanned, hard-bitten face was set in a frown of worry as he stared out over the landscape, his tall, sturdy figure balanced on the balls of his feet, the instinctive pose of a man who has spent much of his life on the uneasy decks of small vessels. Except for his spread-legged stance, there was little of the seaman in his appearance. From his wide-brimmed hat to the dusty toes of his spurred riding boots, he looked the part he was trying hard to play, that of a wandering prospector.

Suddenly a huge stone came hurtling from above and struck the ledge a scant yard from where he stood. Instinctively, he sprang to one side, looked upward and saw a tousled head projected cautiously over the edge of the bluff.

Instantly the feeling of loss that had gripped him following his discovery of Bill Tuck's hat was dispelled in a flash of anger. His blue eyes flamed as he clapped his carbine to his shoulder and fired point blank into the black, bewhiskered face above him. When he saw the head withdrawn, he realized that he had missed. Plunging toward a brushy fissure that slanted toward the summit of the elevation, he began to climb, putting to screaming flight flocks of gorgeous barraband parrots.

Reaching the summit, he looked furiously about him. He saw the black scurrying like a rabbit through the scrub a hundred yards away. Gripped by the explosive ferocity of the Celt, McKinney gave chase, his carbine forgotten in his savage desire to come to hand-grips with the man who had killed his old partner.

The fleeing aborigine halted suddenly at the edge of a sloping gully, where a rock fall had torn a great gap from the face of the bluff. Flexing his knees, he raised his

arms level with his shoulders, then soared like a ski jumper out over the chasm.

When McKinney reached the edge of the crevice, he saw the black shooting downward on the crest of a miniature avalanche, his figure almost obscured by a fog of white dust.

Raising his carbine, McKinney fired twice at the aborigine. At the second shot, the fellow pitched forward and continued his descent flat on his face. Reaching the end of the slide, he bounded to his feet and dived like a rabbit for the cover of the scrub.

McKinney swore, sent two more bullets crashing through the brush below, swore again as he realized the futility of his act. He was about to turn back from the edge of the chasm when he saw a human figure sprawled at the foot of the slide, half buried in loose gravel, a figure whose solid roundness he at once recognized.

"Holy Christopher!" he exclaimed, suddenly hopeful. "It's old Bill."

HE LEAPED down into the gully, sat down on the gravel and tobogganed downward on the loose shale. Braking himself to a stop, he groped through the dust cloud raised by his downward passage and dropped to one knee beside the still figure of Tuck.

"Bill!" The name came in a gasp of relief as Tuck's eyelids fluttered. "It's me, Bill—McKinney. Can you hear me?"

Tuck's pain-filled brown eyes looked dazedly up into McKinney's face, and he muttered, "What's up?" Slow recognition dawned in his eyes. "Ow! It's you, Yank. What 'appened?"

"I'm asking you, Bill," McKinney said. "Don't you know?"

"I don't, for a fact," Tuck declared wearily. He tried to rise, grimaced and lay back on the ground. "Somethin' wrong with me right arm," he announced. "An' me ribs feel like they're stove in."

McKinney made a hasty examination and confirmed Tuck's diagnosis.

"Broken between the elbow and shoulder," he declared.

"Well," Tuck grunted, "that's a nice bloody 'ow-de-do." He pushed himself painfully to a sitting posture and stared up through the sloping gully. "I say! I must 'ave took a tumble through that cut. 'Oly cow!"

He frowned, as if trying to recall what had happened to him. Coated with gray dust from the crown of his partly bald head to the toes of his riding boots, he suggested a bewhiskered John Bull carved in limestone.

"I remember," he said, "I remember climbin' topside, to take a decko over the country. I wasn't sure this 'ere was Beantree Spring an', besides, I was expectin' you to show up, accordin' to plan. I must 'ave been took with the blind staggers, because the next thing I know, I'm lyin' 'ere, an' you yellin' in me ear."

McKinney pondered the other's statement. He suspected that the skulking aborigine had crept up behind Tuck and pushed him over the edge of the chasm. Tuck's fall on the loose gravel was all that had saved his life.

"You sure you didn't see anyone?" McKinney asked.

The Australian shook his head. "Crikey! There wasn't a soul within miles o' this blinkin' place."

"That's where you're wrong, old-timer," McKinney declared. He told Tuck of his recent brush with the blackfellow. "He probably sneaked up behind you and boosted you into that cut. You're lucky to be alive."

"Too bloody bad I didn't land on me 'ead," Tuck growled. "Then I wouldn't 'ave been 'urt a bit." He held out his left hand. " 'Elp me up. I got to get a jury rig on this 'ere flipper."

McKinney helped him to his feet, then looked about him, getting his bearings. To his left, a buttress-like projection masked the foot of the gravel slide. This, he realized, had prevented him from seeing Tuck when he had first arrived at the spring.

He helped Tuck around the buttress and seated him on a boulder in the shade of the towering black bean tree for which the spring was named. Opening his saddle pack, he laid out bandages and adhesive tape, and fashioned a set of splints. Then he cut away Tuck's shirt and singlet and set to work.

As he set and bandaged Tuck's broken arm, he kept a wary eye on the surrounding bush, uneasily aware that the black might be watching them from cover. Anyone, white or black, who could successfully am-

bush Tuck was worthy of respect. He kept his carbine within easy reach as he went about making camp, realizing that the aborigine must still be lurking in the vicinity. The suspicion that the man might be a blood maniac, a tribal outcast, a menace to both whites and blacks, filled him with apprehension.

He built a fire, filled his billy at the spring and set it beside the blaze. While waiting for the water to boil, he removed the saddle and bridle from Tuck's butchered mount, then made a search for the Australian's gear and found it, with his carbine, hidden under a pile of leaves. As he deposited Tuck's belongings beside the boulder, the older man remarked:

"I reckon this knocks all our plans into a cocked 'at."

McKinney shrugged. "Can't be helped," he declared. "I'll have to get you down to Chillagoe, or to some place where you can have proper medical attention. I've got a special O. S. S. radio set in my swag. Suppose I call in and have them send a plane for you? There are plenty of places where they could land."

"No bloody flyin' machine for me—not if I 'ave to bloody-well ride Shank's mare!" Tuck rebelled. "That time we went up to Salamua to bring out Ridgeley was enough for me. Crikey! I was jittery for a month afterward."

McKinney smiled reminiscently. Tuck's aversion to aerial travel was his only weak spot.

Even after four years, he hadn't recovered from the effects of his first and only plane ride.

"I'll have to rustle a horse for you, then," McKinney said. "I think there's a cattle station about a day's ride from here."

He made tea, stirred up a damper and baked it in the ashes of the fire and opened a can of bully beef. After eating, he filled Tuck's pipe and his own. As they settled down for an after-dinner smoke, Tuck grumbled:

"I still don't know why we're playin' jonop up 'ere."

"We're not playing policemen, Bill," McKinney corrected. "We're merely scouts."

"I still don't know what it's all about," Tuck grumbled. "You didn't say in yer telegram. You just asked me to meet you at Beantree Spring. An' I, like a bloody fool, beats the wind gettin' 'ere.

McKinney grinned. "I was saving the explanation until we met. Ever hear of a guy named Hastings?"

"The Brisbane bloke what invented a new sort o' atomic bomb, what?"

"He didn't invent anything," McKinney corrected. "He was on the track of a formula for denaturing uranium and thorium, so they could be used in industry. That was a big thing in itself, so big that the United States government invited him to come to America and continue his research. But the newspapers got hold of the story and carried a lot of misleading hokum about Hastings having discovered a defense against the A-bomb."

"I see," Tuck drawled. "Well, what's up with 'im?"

McKinney knocked the ashes from his pipe. "He was kidnaped," he declared. "It's our job to locate him."

TUCK stared open-mouthed. "My word! Coudn't he 'ave been murdered right there in Brisbane, an' his body chucked into the river?"

"He was kidnaped," McKinney reiterated. "He was preparing to fly down to Sydney, where he'd board a ship for San Francisco. On the night before his departure, two men called at his home, representing themselves as Commonwealth Police officers. They said he was needed at a consultation being held in the United States consulate. He left his house in their company, and hasn't been heard of since. That was a month ago."

"Still an' all," Tuck argued, "he might 'ave been murdered."

McKinney shaved fresh tobacco from his plug and refilled his pipe.

"You remember Keller, the little guy who helped us out on that anti-sabotage assignment in the Southwest year before last?" McKinney continued. "As you know, he'd been blackmailed into joining the German Ausland Organization in the first place, although he had no use for the Nazis, he being of Austrian descent. That was why he finally kicked over the traces and came over to our side. He was given a conditional pardon, and immediately volunteered to work as a government undercover

man in the organization. He did good work, too—turned in a dozen or so Nazi agents. But he never could get close to the chief, Boardmann, or learn where he was hiding out.

"A few hours before Hastings' disappearance, Keller was shot down within a hundred yards of police headquarters. He was pretty far gone when they finally got him to the hospital. He was given blood transfusions, but didn't rally well enough to talk until the next day. By then, it was too late; Hastings had been snatched."

"Keller 'ad been on his way to tip off the jonops when he was plugged, what?" Tuck queried.

"That's right. The A. O. guys must have tumbled to what he was up to. Probably they were getting suspicious, on account of so many of their pals being rounded up by the cops. So they tailed him and put five slugs in him, when they saw where he was headed.

"When the report came in about Hastings' kidnaping, Inspector Clarke, of the Commonwealth Police, flew up from Canberra and took charge of the case. I was in Sydney, preparing for a trip home to the States, my first in six years. Clarke asked me to come up to Brisbane, and told me about the attempt on Keller's life. That was enough for me, because I figure I owe the little guy something for saving my life down in the big timber country year before last.

"When I reached Brisbane, I found Keller in pretty bad shape, although the medics say he'll recover. He told us about the plan to snatch Hastings and carry him out of the country—to Spain, or Argentina—where he'd carry on his research under supervision by the A. O. Aside from that, all he could tell us was that Boardmann had arranged a hideout up here in the peninsula country, somewhere in the vicinity of Cape Keerweer. He couldn't give us the exact location; apparently, Boardmann didn't tell his boys everything.

"Well, Keller's mention of Cape Keerweer instantly suggested that Boardmann planned to slip out of the country aboard a pearling lugger—probably a Portuguese out of Dilli, in Timor. We figured that if Boardmann could make it to Dilli, with Hastings, he could board a Portuguese or a Spanish steamer and slip through our fingers like he's already done the last two times we thought we had him dead to rights. Immediately, Clarke gave out a report to the papers that Keller had died without recovering consciousness. That was to fool the A. O. guys. Then he requested a patrol of the Gulf, and that every vessel in gulf waters be stopped and investigated. Right now, the Gulf is corked tighter than a bottle of pop."

Tuck grunted skeptically. "That's a bloody big order, matey, if I may say so. If I wanted to, I could slip out o' the Gulf right under the red noses o' them navy blokes."

"You could, at that," McKinney conceded. "And so could I. But we're seamen; familiar with the Gulf and adjoining seas. Boardmann, on the other hand, will be forced to rely on someone else. If he tries to run for it, he'll be picked up."

"They're a lot o' bloody fools," Tuck growled. "Don't they know the war's over, blast 'em?"

"The war is never over for guys like Boardmann," McKinney pointed out. "His organization has been operating under one name or another since the days of Bismarck. And it'll keep on operating until a totalitarian Germany can again kick the world in the teeth."

"'Strewth!" Tuck grinned. "You talk like a war bond salesman. But why couldn't the state police 'andle the case?"

"Because," McKinney declared slowly, "I'm the only person on our side, except Keller, who actually has seen Boardmann as he really is. I saw him during the bombing scare back in Sydney in '43. I really got a good look at him then, although at the time I didn't know the guy I was looking at was Boardmann. Well, I never forget a face—you know that. Besides, I've always felt more or less responsible for Boardmann's managing to slip through our fingers at the last minute. That's why I accepted this assignment, figuring it unfinished business. I asked you to come in on account of your knowledge of the country."

Tuck yawned sleepily. "'Strewth! We might as well put in for a land lease an' settle up 'ere."

"There'll be no settling down," McKinney warned. "We've got to keep moving.

If we run across our men—or see anything that looks suspicious, we call the cops on our radio."

"That's all very fine an' large, cocky," Tuck said. "But what if them blokes get us taped? We just sit down, call the jonops and twiddle out thumbs until they arrive, what?"

McKinney shrugged. "We'll have to use our own judgment. If we're attacked, we hit back. But not unless. It would seem much easier to have the cops comb this country for Boardmann and Hastings—assuming Hastings is still alive. But that might jeopardize Hastings' safety, since Boardmann would kill him rather than let him be rescued."

Tuck yawned again. "I feel like 'ell," he announced. "Maybe a bit o' shut-eye might 'elp."

"Don't mind me, old-timer," McKinney said. "If you feel like sleeping, go to it. I've got things to do."

He opened his pack and took out a pair of powerful field glasses. He was beginning to worry, having little faith in his own rough and ready first aid. Tuck, he feared, might be injured internally. Only an iron man could have fallen through the gravel slide and escaped with nothing more serious than a broken arm and two fractured ribs. He glanced at Tuck, who appeared to be asleep. Then he picked up his carbine and started toward the top of the bluff.

AS HE stood on the summit of the bluff, McKinney realized that he was looking out over one part of the Australian continent where the influence of the law was rarely felt. There, in that vast, empty land lying between the central range and the mangrove-fringed shores of the Gulf of Carpentaria was Australia's Back Door, where anything could happen, and often did.

Facing east, he focused the glasses upon the wooded benches which rose like a series of gigantic steps toward the foothills, and beyond them the rounded crests of the McIlwraith Range lying like a vague blue wall against the mid-day sky. Turning slowly about, he swung his glasses along the horizon, looking for the column of smoke he had noticed a while before. It was no longer visible.

Before him the land fell away in a gentle slope into the blue of distance, speckled with dark patches of timber and the flat green of grasslands, with occasional splotches of red marking a giant ant hill, the whole forming a checkerboard of vivid green and purple shadows across which he could trace the course of the dry creek by the red gums lining its banks.

He lowered the glasses, raised them again when something moved in the distance. Then he saw five horsemen galloping across a grassy stretch toward a grove of tulip oaks. As they passed from his view beneath the trees, a band of aborigines erupted from the other side of the thicket and raced toward the dry creek.

With the men in the lead, and with the women and children trailing behind, the blacks were running as if the devil were at their heels. The five horsemen burst from among the trees and raced madly in pursuit. The leader caught up with the stragglers, swung the twelve-foot lash of a stock whip across their naked backs, whipping them toward the head of the running column, just as a drover would whip up straggling cattle on a trail drive.

The men of the band reached the creek bank, halted and faced about, their broad-bladed spears poised threateningly, their trough-shaped wooden shields held in front of their naked chests. The horsemen checked their mounts to a walk, now seemingly unwilling to approach too closely. Holding their formation, the blacks waited until their women and children had streaked past them into the creek bed, then yelled defiance and bolted after them in the dense scrub.

"Well," McKinney exclaimed angrily, "I reckon I've seen everything!"

He saw now that four of the horsemen were blacks attired in cotton shirts, riding breeches and spurred boots. And all four carried rifles. He could see their laughing faces beneath the wide brims of their hats as they rode along the creek bank, firing their rifles into the undergrowth.

"Some squatter is sure as hell letting himself in for a mess of trouble," McKinney mused. "I reckon the cops down in Chillagoe ought to know about this."

As a temporary member of the Commonwealth Police, the Australian counterpart of the American F. B. I., he considered it his

duty to report what he had just seen. Furnishing guns to natives was in strict violation of the law. And these blacks not only had been furnished with rifles, but were being encouraged to use their weapons on their own kind. His blue eyes blazed as he watched the horsemen wheel their mounts and gallop back the way they had come.

"All in the spirit of good, clean fun, I reckon," he remarked as he watched them ride into the distance. "Too bad the state police won't see it that way."

There was no sign of the myalls now. McKinney suspected that they would continue through the creek bed, taking advantage of the dense cover, until they reached the bluff, where they probably would make camp at the spring. He realized the inconvenience of this, reasoning that they would arrive hopping mad and eager to avenge their recent indignity.

DESCENDING hastily to the ground, he moved his horse into the shade of the black bean tree, fearing for the animal's safety. Then he sat down on the boulder, with his carbine across his knees.

Tuck lifted the mosquito net and looked up at McKinney. "What's up?" he wanted to know.

"Myalls—coming this way—about forty or fifty," McKinney explained, then told his partner of the scene he had witnessed from the top of the bluff.

"My word!" Tuck crawled from under the mosquito net and pulled himself to a seat beside McKinney. "Did you notice if there were *jinns* and *birralees* with 'em?"

McKinney nodded. "There were more women and children than men."

"Oh, well," Tuck began, apparently relieved, "they ain't likely to be on the prod. Some squatter got tired of them butcherin' his cows an' chivvied 'em off his run, what?"

"Might be," McKinney conceded. "But I don't like that business of arming blackfellows, even if they've learned to wear clothes."

"Aye, that's bad," Tuck admitted. He pulled his pipe from his trousers pocket and offered it to McKinney. "Fill the old gasper for me, like a good feller, an' quit worryin' about them blackfellers. If they've got their women an' kids along, they're more or less peaceful."

McKINNEY filled both pipes, and they sat there smoking, their eyes on the surrounding scrub. When the blacks finally arrived, they came so silently that McKinney was unaware of their presence until Tuck nudged him with his good arm, then pointed with the stem of his pipe toward the right. Looking up, McKinney saw a tall myall standing like a bronze statue on the edge of the scrub, poised like a bird dog on a point, apparently ready to bolt at the first sign of hostility.

Tuck raised his left hand in a gesture of friendliness, pointed toward the spring and called, *"Bado. Na-laura naga."*

The myall stepped clear of the scrub. Five others came after him, their white, even teeth bared in placating grins. They were tall, well-nourished men, quite unlike the half-starved nomads of the interior.

"Salt-water blackfellers," Tuck muttered. As the first black halted before him, he asked, *"Kokolama wongerra?"*

The myall signified assent by thrusting out his bewhiskered chin. He placed the tip of a slender brown finger on the end of his nose and announced: *"Me Moorungle. Bood jerree wongerra."*

"His name's Moorungle," Tuck translated. "An' he says he's a good feller. These blokes are Kokolamas, from the east coast. They've been peaceful for donkey's years."

Two middle-aged men joined the group. Squatting on their heels, they spoke to Tuck, holding their right hands respectfully before their mouths.

"These blokes are the *beanga* an' his *yowragurrigin,*" Tuck explained. "They're maggin' because them blokes chivvied 'em back toward the 'ills. They claim they've been comin' this way for generations, but never 'ad any trouble before."

He turned back to the chief and his witch doctor and asked another question, listened to the chief's angry statement and then translated it to McKinney.

"These folks belong to the clan of *kurang*—the tiger snake," he said. "There's a buryin' ground o' their clan over 'ere, at the 'ead of a salt-water creek. There used to be a pearlin' station nearby, where they traded for tobacco, an' such. But the station 'as been abandoned since the war. When they reached their old camp day before yes-

terday, four white blokes came from the old pearlin' station an' drove 'em away with guns.

"Now 'ere's the bloody rub. A bloke name o' For-biss runs a cattle station 'ereabouts. These myalls 'ave been crossin' the For-biss lease for donkey's years. In fact, they consider it their *towri*—their tribal 'untin' grounds. This bloke For-biss respected their claim, an' even used to slaughter a beef for 'em when they came this way on their yearly pilgrimage. But this time 'e set 'is stockriders on 'em an' chivvied 'em off 'is run. What d'you think o' that?"

"For-biss," McKinney said, "is probably their way of saying Forbes. A Dr. Alan Forbes has twenty-five thousand acres under pastoral lease. I looked up all obtainable data on this section while I was in Chillagoe. He's the only white man ever to settle up here. When the war broke out, he entered the service as a doctor, and served through the New Guinea campaign, leaving the station in charge of a bailiff. When the Japs made their pass at this part of the coast in '42, the bailiff got cold feet and pulled out, leaving the station to the black stockriders, who promptly called in all their wandering kinfolk in this territory and proceeded to eat up the stock, until the range was bare. The state police seldom get this far north, but they were able to tell me that much, which might explain why Forbes turned sour on the abos and ran 'em off."

Tuck rubbed the end of his rubicund nose and frowned. "That'd make a saint turn sour," he conceded, adding, "Forbes—English name, what?"

"Irish or Scotch," McKinney corrected. "Originally, Mac Firbis." He smiled and added, "I know what you're thinking. I reckon we can cross Doc Forbes' name off our list. He's been up here too long to have any possible connection with Boardmann's outfit. Besides, he was in the service all the time those A. O. guys were pulling their stuff."

Tuck spoke to the chief and pointed toward the remains of his horse. "Thought they'd better scoff that moke o' mine, before it begins to get on the nose an' drive us away from 'ere," he explained to McKinney.

McKinney watched the jinns get to work on the carcass, ignoring the bull ants, which now covered it like scintillating armor. Tuck told the chief about the hindquarters in the cave. Half a dozen blackfellows scrambled up to the ledge and with whoops of delight carried down the prize. Children were scurrying about, gathering firewood. Watching them, McKinney's attention was drawn to a small, scrawny boy, whose light coloring indicated his mixed blood.

"Wonder how come that little yellerfeller to be running with this wild mob?" he mused.

Tuck gave him a cynical grin. "Tut! Tut! It ain't that important."

McKinney shrugged. "What's important to me right now is the presence of those four guys at the old pearling station."

"Probably draft dodgers sittin' out the war," Tuck said. "Or maybe they're just four swaggies who've found a good camp."

"I'd like to look in on 'em, just the same," McKinney declared. "But I've got to get you back to a doctor first."

He stared gloomily at the ground beneath his feet, convinced that the bottom had fallen out of his assignment, that he had muffed the job, although through no fault of his own. Tomorrow he would ride to Forbes' headquarters and borrow or buy a horse to carry Tuck back to civilization. But whether he took the injured man down the peninsula to Chillagoe, or east through the foothills to Yapullan, the result would be a delay of at least two weeks before he could return to this part of the country. In the interval, the patrol of the Gulf might be relaxed, or even abandoned, giving Boardmann and his gang an opportunity to slip out of the country. Just then, McKinney wouldn't have risked a brass farthing on his chances of ever running Boardmann to earth.

THE sun was already high when on the following morning McKinney rode away from the bluff and headed northwest, toward the point where he had noticed the smoke column the day before. He followed the course of the creek, because of the meager shade provided by the red gums lining its banks. The dry stream bed was choked with clumps of pandanus, kauri and hoop pine and tulip oak, stark evidence that no water had flowed between its banks for many years.

The scrub was alive with birds. Parrots and cockatoos screamed from the lofty branches of the tulip oaks. Squatter pigeons kept up their restless flight from tree to ground and back again. Bush turkeys, too heavy to fly, scuttled among the undergrowth. Wirees and singing magpies added their voices to the raucous din of the parrots, and once he flushed a small band of cassowaries, which burst out of the creek bed and fled before his horse with their peculiar, hair-like plumage fluttering in the wind created by their passage.

There were animals, too, in the scrub, possums in the trees, and on the ground kangaroos ranging from the majestic "old man" down to the tiny paddymelon, which is unjustly called the kangaroo rat, but whose succulent, tender flesh is something for the cook books. Because of the abundance of game, McKinney surmised that the myalls would be in no hurry to move on. In this semi-arid country, water was the most vital necessity, and Beantree Spring was the only good drinking water in hundreds of square miles. He had no fear for Tuck's safety. The stocky Australian got along well with most aborigines. Besides, the Kokolamas were peacefully inclined. Before leaving camp, McKinney had bestowed gifts of tea and tobacco on the *beanga* and his *yowragurrigin,* thus making sure that Tuck would be taken care of until his return. Because he didn't plan to be gone for more than twelve hours, he had taken only enough provisions for three meals.

He glanced skyward, noting the position of the sun, and urged his horse to a canter. The grass-bloated animal responded half-heartedly. Suddenly it shied, almost unseating McKinney, and broke into a bone-shaking trot. McKinney's right hand flashed toward the butt of his Webley as a small, olive-hued figure emerged from the scrub to his left.

McKinney yanked the horse back on its haunches and stared at the newcomer, recognizing him as the little half-caste whom he had noticed the day before. He said:

"Hiya, kid?"

"I am very well, t'ank you, Mister Man," the youngster replied. "I like you take me 'long wit' you. Me Chris'n fella." He displayed a small religious medal hanging from a cord about his neck.

McKinney leaned forward in his saddle and stared down at the scrawny, little figure. He estimated that the boy was somewhere between ten and twelve years of age. The youngster seemed to be pitifully undernourished. But he had good features, with little of the aboriginal in them, and his brown eyes were intelligent.

"I don't get this," McKinney said. "Why do you want me to take you with me? I'm not going any place."

The boy frowned, concentrating on McKinney's idiom, and evidently puzzled by it. Presently he explained, "I don' like stop 'long Kokolama peoples. Tucker no good. Mak'm belly b'long me all time *moolally.*"

"How come you're traveling with that mob, if their grub makes you sick?"

Again, the boy concentrated on his answer.

"*Beanga* him papa 'long my mammy. She stop 'long Sistrees mis'on, die one time. Me stop long Sistrees mis'on one, two year. Like'm plenty. Tucker very good. Bimeby Kokolama peoples come 'long. *Beanga* him say 'long me 'You come.' Me go. Thassall." He clasped his hands over his stomach and stared anxiously up at the American.

"Let me get this," McKinney frowned as he unscrambled the boy's statement. "You say your mammy died at Sister Therese's mission, and you stayed there two years, until the old man came along and talked you into running away. That right?"

The youngster nodded vigorously. "Yiss. Thassall. I like go back 'long Sistrees mis'on."

McKINNEY nodded in growing sympathy, recognizing in the scrawny little figure before him one of the tragedies of Australian bush life. This unfortunate result of a casual union between a native "*wiroee*" and some graceless white man was now feeling the call of his father's blood. Doubtless, his two years of life in the mission had permanently unfitted him for life with his mother's people. Now he wanted to get away from them.

"Look, buddy," McKinney said desperately, "I don't know what I can do for you." He thought of what certain types of mind would think if he were to go wandering about the country accompanied by a half-naked boy. "Why don't you go back to

your grandpa's camp and talk him into sending you back to the mission?"

"*Beanga him—*" The boy added a term which he never had learned from the gentle nuns. "Look, Mister Man, him no savvy God. Me Chris'n fella."

"But I don't know what I can do for you," McKinney argued. "You'd be more or less in my way."

The youngster reached behind him and pulled a large kitchen knife from his bark girdle. "Hell' bell, Mister Man!" he exclaimed frantically. "Me no can do go back 'long *beanga.* Steal'm this." He flourished the knife. "Him beat'm seven bell 'longa me. Yiss. Thassall."

McKinney scratched the black bristle on his chin and eyed the boy doubtfully. Mistaking his hesitancy, the youngster added:

"Me good fella 'long scrub, Mister Man. Fin' *bado,* mak'm *gweeun.* All time dam' good fella."

McKinney felt his resistance weakening. It might be, he thought, that the boy really could make himself useful in the bush by finding water and making fire. But unless he stayed in the background, he might actually be a liability, if not a downright cause for embarrassment.

"What's your name, kid?" he asked softly.

"Kokolama peoples him say *'magra,'* " the boy declared shamefacedly. "Sistreese say Fransavier Smit'."

McKinney frowned bewilderedly as he unsnarled the youngster's reply. "Your name's Francis Xavier Smith—that right?"

The youngster flashed his even white teeth in a pleased grin.

"Yiss! You savvy all ri'. Me Fransavier Smit'. No like peoples say *'magra.'* "

McKinney grinned in ready sympathy; no one liked to be called a fish. He supposed that the boy had been so named by his mother's people because of his light coloring.

"All right, Smitty," he agreed. "I'll take you along. When I get down to Chillagoe, I'll turn you over to the jonops, and they'll send you back to Sister Therese's mission. That be all right?"

Francis Xavier Smith nodded vigorously. "Thassall!"

"Another thing," McKinney added "When we meet up with other white men, you must go 'long scrub. You savvy that?"

"Me savvy ever't'ing, yiss," Smitty declared. "Me dam' smart fella. Thassall."

"Okay, Smitty!" McKinney offered his hand. "Hop up behind me and we'll be on our way."

He swung the boy up behind him and rode on through the growing heat of the day, as yet unaware that he had just formed a new partnership.

THE afternoon was well along when McKinney came in sight of the steel water tower of the station rising above the trees beyond the next bend in the creek. When he finally reached the turn, he could see the white walls of the station bungalow between the stately trunks of a jacaranda grove.

He rode on, with the boy clinging to his belt. As he proceeded, he saw on all sides stark evidence of neglect. Paddock poles had been eaten away by the white ants, and their wires lay in rusted loops upon the ground. Following a faint trail that led through a thicket of silky oaks, he saw ahead a group of tumble-down buildings, which he surmised had once housed the riders.

He pulled his horse to a halt in the shadow of the thicket. "Here's where you get off, Smitty," he told the boy. "Get back in the scrub and stay there till I show up again."

The boy inquired anxiously, "You going away?"

"I'll be back," McKinney promised. "I'm just going up to the big house to buy a horse for my pal."

"Him *moolally,* that *duggeragai?*"

"That's right—he's one sick white man," McKinney conceded. "Now hop off."

Smitty slid to the ground and ducked in among the trees. McKinney rode on, emerged from the grove and crossed a stretch of what once had been pasture, but which was now infested with young cactus. He realized that a long time must have elapsed since the police had patroled this section of the country, otherwise something would have been done to control the pest, because landholders in Australia are required by law to eliminate all such growths on their property.

Nearing the bungalow, he saw that the paint had scaled from its weather-boarding in great patches, and that its galvanized iron roof was now a solid expanse of red rust.

He rode on toward the building and reined in at the foot of the rotting veranda steps.

Four black stockriders squatting on their heels in the shade of the bungalow regarded him suspiciously from beneath their wide hat brims. One grunted:

"What you want, white fella?"

"I'll tell that to your boss when I see him," McKinney retorted. "Where is he?"

He looked them over, recognizing them as the same four he'd seen chivvying the myalls the day before. They stared back at him, their black eyes hostile.

A man in a wheel chair propelled himself through the front door, stopped his vehicle near the edge of the veranda and peered down at McKinney through heavy-tinted glasses.

"Good afternoon, young man!" he greeted, a faint trace of Scots burr in his voice.

"Good afternoon, sir!" McKinney responded. "You're Dr. Forbes?"

"Yes, yes," the other admitted impatiently. "What is it?"

McKinney gave his name and then continued, "I'm trying to buy a horse."

Forbes shook his head. He appeared to be about sixty-five, for his hair and neatly trimmed beard were snowy white. Because of the tinted glasses, McKinney was unable to determine the color of his eyes.

"I can't sell you a horse," he refused. "I haven't any to spare. My station was stripped bare while I was away. Sorry!" He paused and looked meaningly at McKinney's mount. "What's up with that one?"

"It's not for myself, sir," McKinney explained. "I camped yesterday at Beantree Spring and found an old chap who'd been bushed by myalls and his horse speared. I've got to get him to some place where he can have proper medical attention."

"Myalls, you say?" Forbes queried sharply. "Could they have been the same band my men chased off our run yesterday?"

"I wouldn't know, sir," McKinney shrugged. "All I'm sure about is that the old chap needs medical care. Perhaps you, a doctor—"

"Tut, tut!" Forbes interrupted sharply. "Do you realize, young man, that I, too, am in need of a doctor?" He smiled and added, "Not that I wouldn't be happy to treat your friend, if I were in shape. But a man wi' sprue is never spry. And that's not intended as a joke, my dear chap."

McKinney nodded in quiet sympathy, realizing that a man afflicted with the dread tropical neurasthenia known as sprue would need all the sympathy he could get.

Forbes said pettishly, "I take it that you and your friend are prospecting, what? You know, I used to bar prospectors from my lease." He looked up as another man came around the corner of the house. "Ah, Harry!" He indicated McKinney with a wave of his hand and continued, "This is Mr. McKinney, a prospector. Mr. McKinney, my foreman, Mr. Harry Fox."

Fox's greeting was typically Australian. He nodded and said:

"Afternoon! How's it?"

"So-so," McKinney shrugged, then grinned and added, "It'd be better if you folks would sell me a horse."

Fox strode past him up the veranda steps, his spurs tinkling, and looked down at McKinney with milky, blue eyes that were expressionless as glass marbles. He was a stocky, blond man, with a square-jawed face. McKinney recognized him as the whip-wielding white man who had led the black stockriders the day before.

"W'ot's the matter with the nag yer got?" Fox inquired in a whining accent that suggested London's Whitechapel. "'E looks 'ealthy ter me."

McKINNEY repeated the explanation he had just given Forbes. As he concluded, Fox sneered:

"Now ain't that just too perishin' bad! Look, matey, the boss 'ere is too blinkin' perlite to say it, but I ain't got no manners w'ot keeps me from tellin' yer to get on yer nag an' bloody-well shag off this 'ere lease. I'm a-tellin' yer, Mister bloody digger!"

Forbes smiled apologetically. "Oh, come now, Harry!" he chided. "This young man's case is different. He isn't prospecting our land." He peered at McKinney through his dark glasses. "Are you, now, young man?"

"All I want is a horse to carry my friend back to civilization," McKinney repeated, fighting back a fierce urge to slam a left to the cockney's sneering face.

"I'm sorry," Forbes apologized. "We have only enough mounts for our people. If I were my old self, I'd have your unfortu-

nate friend brought here. But I——" His voice trailed off to a whisper, as if speaking tired him.

"Well, that's that," McKinney shrugged. "If you can't sell me a horse, I reckon I'll have to do the best I can with the one I've got. Good day to you, Doctor!"

Ignoring the glowering foreman, he walked to his horse, swung into the saddle and rode away.

McKINNEY found Smitty awaiting him in the silky oak grove, his peaked olive-hued face widened in a grin of relief. As he swung up behind McKinney, the boy asked:

"You no catchum horse?"

"No," McKinney admitted, "they wouldn't sell."

"Other fella For-biss all ri'," Smitty said. "This fella For-biss very bad."

"What are you saying, kid?" McKinney probed. "You mean there are two Forbes?"

"*Beanga* him papa b'long my mammy him say long time one fella For-biss. 'Nother time 'nother fella For-biss. Me no savvy.

McKinney was puzzling over the youngster's statement when the latter made another announcement.

"Me look-see new blackfella."

"A new blackfeller? What are you driving at, kid?"

"One time litty bit," the boy declared haltingly, "you go 'long *murri-mia.* New blackfella him come, stop 'long scrub."

"You mean a strange blackfeller, don't you?" McKinney probed.

"Yiss," Smitty confirmed. "Coming here, me look-see that fella one, two time."

"You mean he's been tailing us from Beantree Spring?"

"Yiss. Him stop 'long scrub. You no look-see. Me look-see plenty that fella. Thassall."

"Hell's bells!" McKinney scratched the black stubble on his chin and wondered if Smitty's "new blackfella" could be the one who had bushed Tuck at the spring. Probably he had been scared away by the arrival of the Kokolamas, and was now trailing him and the boy. "This is getting serious, kid. We'll need to keep our eyes peeled. Did he have weapons, *kamai* or *goorabiri*—spear or gun?"

"Him no got one thing, no *kamai,* no *goorabiri,* no clothes. Him number one poor fella. Thassall."

"Christopher!" McKinney grunted. "This is getting me down. It's bad enough to have old Bill all stove up, without having to worry about some crazy blackfeller on my trail."

He rode on, facing upstream toward the bluff, glad now that he had taken Smitty along, realizing that the youngster's bush-wise eyes would see danger long before it was apparent to himself.

They had put several miles behind them when McKinney's horse sniffed and stretched his neck eagerly toward the creek. Smitty muttered *"Bado!"* slid from the animal's back and scuttled down the bank into the creek bed. Halting beside a clump of fern, he beckoned.

McKinney rode down the bank and dismounted beside a soak hole. Smitty collected sticks for a fire. In a few minutes they were sitting beside the blaze, waiting for the water in the billy to boil.

Suddenly the boy said: "Got'm *burla* horse 'long *murri-bado.*" He held up his right hand. "Fi' fella horse."

"Plenty horses near the big water?" McKinney translated the boy's weird jargon. "Is that the place where the Kokolama people used to camp?"

"Yiss. One place dead peoples him stop. 'Nother place got'm *burla murri-mia.* Horse him stop 'long that place."

"Some buildings near a native burying ground, eh?" McKinney mused. "How far is that place from here?"

"We go now," Smitty said, pointing toward the sun, "him *wirri* finish we come 'long that place."

McKinney glanced at his wrist-watch. "It's a good three hours to sundown. At our rate of travel through the scrub, that means about fifteen miles."

"We go?" Smitty inquired.

"You can bet your Sunday g-string, we'll go," McKinney declared. "A few hours more or less won't make any difference to Bill. I might get him a horse. Besides, I want to see what those guys are like."

After a meal of bully beef and strong, black tea, they mounted and rode west through the creek bed. Hidden by the dense bush, they passed the station homestead without being observed. Smitty kept a

sharp lookout over their back trail, watching for some sign of the black who, McKinney was now confident, had followed them from Beantree Spring.

THE SKY was flaming like burnished copper, and the red gums were casting long, purple shadows, when McKinney checked his horse on the edge of a marshy, reed-grown stretch, beyond which the creek flowed bank full between dark lines of mangrove. The air was heavy with the salt tang of the sea, blending with the iodine scent of drying seaweed and the dank odor of decaying vegetation. A crocodile slid from among the mangroves and splashed into the creek with a noise that sounded like a thunderclap in the evening stillness.

Dismounting, McKinney dipped water in his cupped palm and found it salty. "Tide backing up from the Gulf, I reckon," he mused. Turning to Smitty, he asked, "How much farther is that place you spoke about?"

The boy looked about him in the fading daylight, getting his bearings, and then pointed toward the north bank. "Litty bit we fin' place b'long dead peoples," he declared.

He led the way out of the creek bed. McKinney followed with his horse, paused to tether the animal to a tree, then went on. The bush closed about them like a green wall as they felt their way along a wallaby run and came out in a clearing dotted with heaps of dugong bones. Smitty went ahead like a scrawny shadow, confidently treading his way across the native burial ground to another stretch of bush, so dense that McKinney had difficulty in keeping up with him. Finally they emerged from the scrub and found themselves in a wide expanse of spear grass, across which they crept, bent double, and came up against the barb-wire of a paddock in which drowsed four horses.

A glance told McKinney that the animals were brumbies, shaggy, unkempt stock horses, half wild. Without a rope, he could never get one of them out of the paddock.

Beyond the paddock were several buildings, most of them open sheds with galvanized iron roofs, all of them in an advanced state of decay due to the ravages of white ants. Beyond the huddle of buildings water shimmered darkly in the growing moonlight, revealing a sagging wharf jutting out from the bank, and beside it what appeared to be a huge pile of driftwood. As McKinney watched, a light showed for an instant among the buildings.

"Listen, Smitty," he pressed the boy's shoulder, "I'm going to take a look-see. You stay here."

"Bad falla him stop 'long that place," the youngster warned. "Got'm gun."

"I'll have to take that chance," McKinney whispered. "Now, pay attention to what I'm going to say. If I don't come back before the moon shows over those trees yonder, you run back to where we left the horse, climb on and ride back to the spring. Tell Tuck what happened. You savvy?"

"Savvy, all ri'." Smitty pouted. "Me go back, *beanga* him knock seven bell 'longa me fo' steal'm knife."

McKinney chuckled. "You tell Tuck about that. He won't let your grandpa beat you for swiping his knife. You just do like I told you, and everything will be okay. You savvy that?"

The boy nodded. "Thassall."

McKinney moved quietly away from the paddock and circled toward the group of buildings, one of which he now perceived was still in use, for its unglazed window openings were covered with mosquito netting.

Reaching the building, he crouched in its shadow, cursing softly when he saw his own shadow on the ground. He glanced skyward, looked eastward and saw the first rays of the rising moon showing among the trees. In the paddock a horse snorted in fear. McKinney dropped to the ground, wondering what had disturbed the animal.

"Probably scented a dingo," he decided finally.

HE CREPT on all fours to the corner and cautiously poked his head around the angle. He now had a clear view of the wharf, and saw that what he had thought to be a pile of driftwood was really a ten-ton yawl, her mast and jigger unstepped, her deck buried under a huge pile of brush which, he surmised, was to render her invisible from the air.

A light was shining from one of the windows facing the wharf, and through the opening there was being wafted a tantalizing odor of frying fish and boiling coffee.

Telling himself that honest seamen didn't camouflage their craft, he tiptoed along the side of the building toward the lighted window, passing another opening blocked by stout, wooden bars.

Halting to one side of the lighted window, he peered inside. The room was illuminated by a candle stuck in the neck of a bottle, revealing three bearded men grouped about a table, expectantly watching a fourth, who bent over a rusty stove a few feet away, turning frying fish in a huge skillet.

McKinney studied the bearded faces of the trio around the table, all of whom would have passed unnoticed in any mining camp. Only the cook looked different, for he was a short, slender man, with quick-moving brown eyes in a sharp-featured, clean-shaven face.

McKinney moved back from the window, debating with himself what to do next. In his mind there was a picture of a medium-sized blond-haired man, with mild blue eyes set high in a lantern-jawed face. That was the picture he still retained of Axel Boardmann, as he had seen him two years before, in Sydney. And none of the men in the room answered that description.

HE WAS retreating quietly toward the corner when he passed the barred window. He stopped, crouched below the sill, trying to make himself invisible to the man who was pearing out between the slats.

The man inside the window hissed cautiously. "I say, my man," he whispered, "are you connected with the police?"

McKinney rose and peered between the bars. "Who are you?" he asked.

"My name is Hastings," the other declared." Ralph Bedford Hastings."

"Jackpot!" McKinney muttered. Aloud, he asked, "Can't you get out?"

"I've worn myself out trying," Hastings declared. As McKinney laid hold of one of the bars, he warned, "No soap, old man. They'll hear you. And they're pretty bad characters."

"I'm a pretty bad character myself," McKinney admitted. He gripped the wooden bar, strained against it and felt it give. "This shouldn't be hard."

"You'll never do it without making a noise," Hastings said. Suddenly he exclaimed, "Oh! Watch out!"

Almost in the same breath came Smitty's boyish treble. "Mister Man!"

McKinney heard a whisper of movement at his back. He turned his head, saw a lanky, shock-headed figure standing behind him in a half crouch, right arm upraised. The next instant something crashed down on the top of his skull, and he slumped to the ground, out cold.

MCKINNEY opened his eyes, looked at the moonlit rectangle of the window and blinked. He tried to raise his right hand to his throbbing head and failed. Slowly, the realization dawned upon him that he was bound hand and foot.

"Holy Christopher!" he muttered. He swiveled his head from side to side and peered about the room, which was in pitch darkness, save for a pearly shaft of moonlight slanting through the barred window. Outside, there was commotion—the stamp of running feet and a confused babble of men's voices. Somewhere in the distance a tommy-gun chattered like an angry gecko.

"What in hell's going on?" he wondered.

"They're trying to round up your friends," a voice announced from the darkness beyond the shaft of moonlight. "Are you all right?"

"Who are you?"

"Hastings. I tried to warn you, but I was too late. Now I'm tied up, just like you."

"What happened?" McKinney asked.

"That blackfellow," Hastings started to explain. "He must have been following you. When you stopped outside the window, he crept up behind you and knocked you on the head."

"Holy fly!" McKinney muttered, Smitty's warning cry seeming to ring again in his ears. He realized now that the black had tailed them from the spring. "But why?" he wondered aloud. "How does he fit into this mess?"

"He's one of the gang," Hastings declared. "They keep him posted at a certain spring about twenty miles from here. He reports everything that happens there to some intermediate point, from which it is relayed to this place by radio. He's a former police tracker gone bad."

"Bad," McKinney mused, "is right." He listened for a minute to the commotion outside. "What are they raising all that rumpus for?"

"They're trying to run down your companions," Hastings explained. "I heard that damned blackfellow report that you weren't alone."

"Smitty!" McKinney gasped. "Oh, gosh!"

"Beg pardon?"

"It isn't important," McKinney turned his question aside. He feared that someone might be eavesdropping, and he didn't want to jeopardize the youngster's safety by talking about him. To change the subject, he said, "As soon as it was known that you'd been snatched, every ship, every train, and every plane leaving Brisbane was searched. Even cars on the road were stopped and their passengers inspected. For weeks, the police have been watching every exit from the city. All that makes me wonder how they carried you up here."

"It was quite simple," Hastings revealed. "First, they gave me some drug, scopalamin, I think. Then they shaved off my beard, plucked my eyebrows and made up my face like a woman's, and dressed me in woman's clothing. They even had a woman in nurse's uniform to look after me. You see, I was supposed to be a very sick old lady. We traveled from Brisbane in a closed motor car, followed the highway north to Innisfail. There two of our present jailers met us with a wagon and carried us across the range. Later, they abandoned the wagon and took to horseback. By then, there was no longer any need for secrecy. So they gave me back my own clothes. But they kept up the drug until a few days ago."

"Know anything about what they'd planned to do with you, once they'd got you up here?"

"Oh, yes! Boardmann, their leader, was quite frank about everything. He told me I'd be carried in a sailing vessel to Dilli, and there put on board a Spanish steamer bound for South America, where I would be given every opportunity to perfect my formula. But something went wrong."

McKinney chuckled; he knew only too well what had happened to upset their plans.

At the same time he was apprehensive that at any time now the gulf patrol might be relaxed, thus giving Boardmann the opportunity to slip away with his prisoner.

"That drug," Hastings added, "made me completely helpless. I knew what was going on, but couldn't speak a word or move a muscle."

"They know all the wrinkles," McKinney admitted. "This Boardmann is quite a guy."

"A fanatic, if you ask me," Hastings retorted acidly. "Are you aware that his followers give him a title which means 'Our Leader in Australia'? If Germany had won the war, I suppose he'd have become a sort of Australian Hitler, since he's been head of German operations in this country for years. Why, he boasted to me that men of his organization had enlisted in the army for the sole purpose of passing along military information to the Japanese."

"That's old stuff," McKinney told him. "They've been working that gag everywhere, and getting away with it, except in the States. Over there, the F. B. I. immobilized the Ausland Organization before it could do any serious damage."

"The depressing thing—"

"Hush!" McKinney stopped him. "They're coming in."

THE rumpus outside had ceased. Footfalls sounded somewhere in the building. The door of the room was jerked open, letting in a slanting beam of yellow candlelight. McKinney looked up as a man appeared in the doorway, recognizing him from his build as the slender, clean-shaven fellow he had seen bending over the cookstove a short while before.

"Well, Lindorfer," Hastings greeted him calmly, "did you catch those bold, bad policemen?"

Ignoring him, the newcomer bent over McKinney, tested the American's bonds and asked, "How many were with you, jonop?"

"That," McKinney drawled, "is for you to find out, squarehead."

Lindorfer kicked McKinney in the ribs and snapped, "Mind your manners, you swine! You'll talk right enough when the boss gets here." He went out, slamming the door behind him.

"The depressing thing," Hastings resumed, as though there had been no interruption, "is that so many of Boardmann's followers are Australian born. You'd think—"

"That's exactly what I want to do," McKinney cut him off. Hastings' revelations were old stuff to him, and he wanted to con-

centrate on some plan for getting himself and the scientist out of their present difficulty.

He listened to sounds coming faintly from the other room, the scrape of feet on the rough floorboards, the mumble of men's voices and, finally, a soft, fluttering sound.

"Wonder what they're doing?" he mused aloud.

"Playing cards," Hastings revealed. "They play continually. By the way, that fellow Lindorfer hinted that the leader, Boardmann, was on his way here. I heard him calling Boardmann on the radio soon after they captured you." He paused for a second or two and then asked, "What was that?"

"That" sounded to McKinney as if something were rubbing against the underside of the floor. Someone, he realized, was crawling about underneath the house. He looked up as a shadow passed through the moonlight outside the window. Hastings whispered:

"They've got that blackfellow standing guard outside."

ROLLING over on his face, McKinney placed his lips to a wide crack between the floorboards and hissed. Something bumped against the floor joists almost beneath him. He whispered, "That you, Smitty?"

"Ah! Yiss!" He could feel the boy's breath in his ear. "Them fella catch you?"

"That's right," he admitted. It was on the tip of his tongue to censure the youngster for not obeying orders and making all speed back to Tuck with the news of his capture, when he remembered Smitty's stolen knife. "Listen, kid," he whispered eagerly, "slip that knife blade up through the crack and hold it steady."

"Can do," the boy responded. Immediately, the long blade slid up between the floorboards.

McKinney squirmed over until he lay face downward on the floor and hooked the doubled inch of rope connecting his wrists over the blade of the knife. As he began sawing the rope up and down the keen edge, Hastings asked curiously:

"What on earth are you doing?"

"Just scratching," McKinney answered. "Got a bad case of prickly heat." To keep the conversation away from himself, he probed, "Just what does Boardmann want of you?"

Hastings sighed. "Something I don't possess, as yet. If I had been permitted to continue my investigations without interruption, I might have proved my theory. Now, I fear, it's too late, for I suppose some fellow in America will get ahead of me. But Boardmann won't believe what I tell him. He thinks I've discovered something knew in nuclear physics, and refuses to believe otherwise." He sighed again and added, "Strange that a man can be so clever and at the same time so credulous."

"The well-known Nazi blind spot," McKinney laughed shortly. "Boardmann's been out here since '40, getting things ready for the big blow-off. He was one of their best men, an honor graduate of the Military Intelligence School, in Prince Friedrich Karl Strasse, in Berlin. But out here he's made one mistake after another. Not one plan he's ever made has succeeded."

He felt the last strand of rope part, and he chuckled again, happy now that he could at last see his way out of the jam. He leaned over, put his lips to the crack and whispered:

"Okay, Smitty. Now you'd better get along to the scrub. You might get hurt if you stick around here."

"No can do," the youngster complained. "Blackfella him walk about. Got'm gun."

"Well, maybe you'd better stay where you are for a while," McKinney advised. "But don't take any more risks. You've done enough."

Without removing the clove hitches still encircling his wrists, he started work on the ropes about his ankles. Suddenly a bushy head blocked the window. Dropping flat on his back, McKinney glared at the black peering between the bars, a shotgun slanting over his right shoulder. Quietly, McKinney crossed his wrists over his stomach.

The black lowered his shotgun and leaned it against the side of the house. Then he rested his elbows on the window ledge and stared in at McKinney. Half an hour passed. The black remained immovable. McKinney wished vainly that the fellow would move on. But apparently the aborigine was enjoying the white man's frustration.

Another half-hour passed, with the fuzzy head of the black still silhouetted against the

moonlight streaming through the window. Several times Hastings spoke, but McKinney ignored him, his mind filled with the problem now presented by the gloating blackfellow. Finally, unable to restrain himself any longer, he barked:

"Get away from that window, you frizzle-headed ape! You're shutting off our air."

The black laughed huskily. "Bimeby come number one boss man stop air," he taunted. "Him come now—you hear?"

McKinney felt his solar plexus flutter as his ears picked up a drumming of distant hooves. He realized what that meant. Boardmann had been called, and was now on his way. As he listened to the hoofbeats coming nearer, he felt that Smitty's valiant effort had been in vain, that he must now wait in fuming helplessness until Boardmann arrived to pass judgment upon him.

SILENTLY cursing the black, McKinney listened to the hoofbeats coming closer with every passing minute, listened in growing dismay as they broke from a gallop to a trot and then to a fast walk. The creak of saddle leather, as the riders dismounted before the house, sounded in his ears like the creaking gates of Hades opening to receive him.

A buzz of voices sounded from the front of the building, eager explaining voices, which were suddenly stilled as another voice was raised in angry denunciation. Listening, McKinney felt that he had heard that voice before, although just now he couldn't understand what the speaker was saying, for the words were spitting, guttural German.

"Sounds like an angry tom-cat," he chuckled, faintly amused, although his forehead was beaded with cold perspiration. Twice before, he had fallen into the clutches of Boardmann's confederates, and he wondered now if his luck hadn't worn thin.

"That's Boardmann," Hastings explained. "He's giving them a wigging for letting your pals escape. He seems to be in an awful funk."

McKinney groaned. "Reckon if I told him I had no pals, he'd think I was lying."

"Oh, quite!" Hastings sniffed contemptuously. "Being a trickster himself—" He broke off as footfalls sounded in the other room. "Here he comes now—hold your hat!"

The door slammed open. Lindorfer entered, carrying a candle in his right hand. Tucked under his left arm was an Owens gun. McKinney stared longingly at the efficient little Australian army sub-machine gun, as Lindorfer crossed the room and placed the bottle holding the candle on a shelf.

Lying on his back, with his supposedly bound hands folded on his stomach, McKinney looked up at the two men who entered behind Lindorfer, his eyes fixed in mingled surprise and realization upon the bearded face leering down into his own, his lips soundlessly forming the words, "Doc Forbes."

"So!" The man whom he had known as Dr. Forbes spoke with mocking emphasis. "It is our friend who wanted to buy a horse. *Schweinhund!* Did you take me for a fool? Did you not suspect that our organization has a photograph and description, complete with fingerprints, of everyone connected with the Commonwealth Police?"

McKinney cursed his own blindness, realizing that he had been taken in by a wheel chair and a bottle of hair bleach. When he had seen Boardmann in Sydney, almost three years ago, the German had been clean-shaven. But the addition of a beard had completely changed the contour of his long, high-cheek-boned face, and an application of bleach to his blond beard, hair, and eyebrows had added a quarter of a century to his age.

McKinney grinned mirthlessly. "You guys sure had me fooled." He looked past Boardmann at Fox and added, "I never figured you as anything but honest-to-God cockney, Fox."

"The name's Streck," the other corrected, scowling. "And I'm German—and proud of it."

"Swell!" McKinney commented. "It's great to be proud. Helps your blood pressure, or something." He continued to stare at Streck, only now aware that he had been completely taken in on both counts, for in spite of the fellow's whining cockney speech, he had a German look. He stared fixedly at Boardmann and queried, "I presume there really was a Dr. Forbes?"

Boardmann grinned broadly. "Oh, yes. The same tense applies to the worthy doctor's batman, the late Mr. 'Arry Fox, of Camden Town, in dear, ole Lunnon."

"I get it," McKinney said. "Forbes' place looked good to you. So you moved in, liquidated the doctor and his batman and took over. That right?"

"That's exactly what happened, my friend," Boardmann admitted with a self-satisfied grin. "Of course, there had to be a few minor changes in my own and Streck's appearance. But that was a mere detail.

"We picked the Forbes place primarily because it was known all over the Peninsula country that the worthy doctor disliked prospectors and sought to bar them from his lease. That insured us privacy. Besides, the nearest police detachment is at Yapullun, nearly a hundred miles away."

"You figure all the angles," McKinney conceded. "But I've noticed you always slip at the last minute. How come?"

Boardmann shrugged. "Perhaps I have failed to accomplish everything I was sent here to do. But we aren't finished. Hitler is dead, yes; but his spirit lives."

"You mean, the stink lingers," McKinney taunted.

Boardmann kicked McKinney viciously in the side. "How dare you!" he bellowed. "How dare you, *schwein!*" He snapped an order to Streck, who cut the ropes about McKinney's ankles and yanked him to his feet.

"Now," Boardmann looked searchingly into the American's face, "you will tell me who was with you."

"If I did," McKinney retorted, "you wouldn't believe me."

"Answer!" Boardmann snarled. Drawing back his right hand, he drove a clumsy punch at McKinney's face.

McKinney ducked the blow. Streck uttered a warning yelp as the prisoner's supposedly bound hands flew apart, his left thudding into Boardmann's brisket, his right landing soggily beneath the German's left ear. Boardmann fell back against Streck, knocking him off balance. Then both went to the floor in a confused tangle of arms and legs.

LINDORFER, his eyes popping in mingled amazement and panic, was pulling the Owens gun from under his arm when McKinney's fist splintered his jaw. He reeled backward and slammed against the wall, down which he slid limply to a sitting posture on the floor, the lower part of his face grotesquely awry.

McKinney snatched up the gun, turned again to face Boardmann and his lieutenant, both of whom were still on the floor, Boardmann out like a shattered light bulb. But Streck was struggling to his knees, his right hand tugging at the Luger pistol thrust inside the waistband of his trousers. McKinney slapped him on the side of the head with the barrel of the machine gun and snatched the pistol from his hand. He relieved Boardmann of his Luger, and Lindorfer of a Webley revolver, and began to feel that he was getting the situation in hand.

A shotgun bellowed outside the window. McKinney ducked instinctively. Hugging the floor, he saw the black fall away from the opening, his face a formless blur in the moonlight.

Someone shouted in German. Footfalls sounded hollowly on the sun-baked ground. McKinney saw a man run past the window, pull up suddenly and beckon. Two other men joined the first, one of them hugging a tommy-gun. As they huddled about the still figure of the black, McKinney recognized them as the bearded trio he had seen seated at the table in the other room. Hastily, he blew out the candle.

Puzzled, McKinney watched them as they held their frozen posture, peering toward the encroaching bush, the fellow with the tommy-gun holding his piece at the firing position, as if they expected to be attacked. Quietly, he poked the muzzle of the Owens gun between the bars of the window and covered the trio.

"Listen, you mugs," he drawled, "I've got you covered. Also, I've got your hip-pocket Hitler and his yes-man in the bag, all ready for delivery to the hangman. Play wise and drop the bundle."

For nearly a minute they stood in a frozen huddle, their eyes fixed upon the barred, unlighted window. Suddenly they broke, scattered in all directions. The fellow with the tommy-gun loosed a burst at the opening as he darted toward the corner of the house. McKinney cut him down with a spray from the Owens gun, then looked for the others. But they had escaped out of range around the building.

A flurry of hoofbeats sent him rushing

through the house and out the front doorway. He barged through the opening just in time to see the two survivors dashing away on the horses which had carried Boardmann and Streck to the old pearling station. McKinney sent a futile burst of machine-gun bullets after them as they plunged into the spear grass, bending low in their saddles.

For a moment he stood there, listening to the diminishing beat of their horses' hooves, thankful that he didn't have to bother with them. Sooner or later, the police would pick them up, for they wouldn't dare go far from water in this semi-arid land.

McKINNEY went back inside and relighted the candle. He was giving his captives an extra frisking, making certain that none of them had a hold-out gun, when Hastings spoke.

"My word! You must have trained with the commandos, my friend."

McKinney looked at Hastings, seeing him for the first time. The scientist was sitting on the floor, his back against the inner wall, his wrists and ankles securely fastened—a slender, middle-aged man whose amused blue eyes twinkled from settings of puffed and blackened flesh like sapphires glittering against a background of purple velvet.

"I wouldn't know a commando," McKinney declared slowly, "if it wore a plug hat and a kilt, and went about playing the bagpipes." He knelt and unfastened the scientist's bonds. "Those birds must have given you a working over."

"That was Lindorfer," Hastings revealed. "He's the official torturer. They wanted something I didn't have." He grinned and added, "For the very good reason that all my notes were in my luggage. When they took me, they overlooked that. Stupid, what?"

"The old blind spot again," McKinney chuckled.

He used the rope taken from Hastings to make a seamanlike job of immobilizing his three prisoners. Not until all three were firmly secured did he feel completely at ease. He stood looking down at the trio. Streck was still unconscious, Boardmann was showing signs of returning animation, and Lindorfer was moaning through pain-twisted lips. Here, McKinney told himself, was the last of the Nazi Fifth Column in Australia. The pair who had escaped didn't count. Anyway, they'd be picked up later. What really counted was the fact that the leader of the organization was at last a prisoner.

For reasons of security, the sinister activities of Boardmann and his crowd had been denied publication. Likewise, nothing had been given to the papers concerning the kidnaping of Hastings. Everything so far had been strictly hush-hush, and public policy would dictate that it remain so. Boardmann and Streck would be tried for the murder of Dr. Forbes and his batman, Harry Fox. Nothing would be brought out at the trial concerning the Ausland Organization. And Boardmann and his lieutenant, and possibly Lindorfer, would be hanged as common murderers which, McKinney agreed, was exactly what they were.

"What I don't like about a job of this sort," he told Hastings, "is the necessity of riding herd on those guys till the cops come and take them off my hands. You said they had a radio—"

"In the other room," Hastings said.

McKinney picked up the candle and went in search of the radio. He found it packed in a tin-lined, moisture-proof box—a special O.S.S. job, just like the one he'd left in Tuck's care.

"Boy, is this luck!" he exclaimed joyfully. "Wonder how they managed to swipe this? They sure didn't miss many bets."

In a few minutes he was talking to Yapullun. "I've got three prisoners," he declared. "Phone Chillagoe to get a plane up here. They can land at Forbes Station homestead, where the ground is solid. From there they can come on horseback to the old pearling station, where I am now. That's all!"

He put away the radio, stirred up the embers in the rusty stove and added fresh fuel. "When I came here a while ago," he declared to Hastings, "I smelled coffee cooking, and it damned near caused me to change my allegiance. How about a slug of jamoke, Professor?"

The scientist looked faintly puzzled. He said, "If you mean a cup of coffee, I'd like it very much." He started as a small figure appeared in the doorway. "My word! What—?"

"Smitty!" McKinney shouted joyfully. "Holy fly, kid, I thought you'd gone over the hill. Come on in."

The youngster came timidly into the room, trailing a shotgun in his right hand. He grinned shamefacedly at McKinney and declared:

"Blackfella him all time finish."

"Christopher!" McKinney exclaimed. "I've been wondering about that. Did you knock him off, kid?" To make his meaning clearer, he added, *"Ganto bon bunkulla teti kulwan?"*

The boy nodded. "Blackfella him stop long time. Me downside, plenty 'fraid. Bimeby bobbery upside. Blackfella him catch'm gun, me make catch'm gun one time. Gun make'm big 'moom'! Blackfella finish. Thassall."

McKINNEY scratched the black bristle on his chin and frowned as he sifted meaning from the boy's vernacular explanation.

He gathered that Smitty, afraid to come from under the house because of the presence of the black on one side and the three white men guarding the rest of the building, had attempted to snatch the shotgun leaning against the side of the house, just as the black had started to pick it up to fire through the window. Obviously, the youngster had hooked a finger around the trigger, with disastrous results for the aborigine.

McKinney looked down at the boy, who appeared ready to bolt.

"That's all right, kid." He grinned reassuringly. "You did very well. That feller was plenty bad—*burla wiri.* Savvy?"

Turning to Hastings, he said, "I'm still puzzled about the way those guys acted when they found the dead blackfeller." He went on to describe the behavior of the trio. "They acted as if there was someone back in the scrub."

"I believe I can explain that," Hastings offered. "As you know, the blackfellow followed you here from Beantree Spring, waiting for a chance to do you in. His opportunity came while you were talking to me through the window. After knocking you on the head, he called to the others, who carried you inside and trussed you up. When he told them you weren't alone, Lindorfer instantly suspected the old police trick of setting one man out in front as bait, and that others were back in the scrub, waiting until daylight. That was why he posted the blackfellow on guard. When Boardmann arrived, he accepted Lindorfer's suspicions as fact, and stationed the others all around the house."

"And when Smitty shot the blackfeller by accident, they figured the marines had arrived." McKinney rubbed his hands and grinned. "That was why they swiped the horses belonging to Boardmann and Streck. Loyalty didn't count when they thought the scrub was full of cops."

"It seems," Hastings said, "that we owe something to your young—er—associate, what?"

McKinney felt his ears redden at the scientist's inference. He said:

"Don't get the wrong idea, Professor. Only for him, I'd be fodder for the bull ants this minute. But please forget that 'young associate' line. He's clean as a whistle—and if he was my son, I'd be proud to acknowledge him, in spite of his color."

"I beg your pardon," Hastings apologized. "I didn't—"

"Forget it!" McKinney cut him off. He then told of his meeting with Smitty, and of the boy's desire to leave his mother's people and return to the mission.

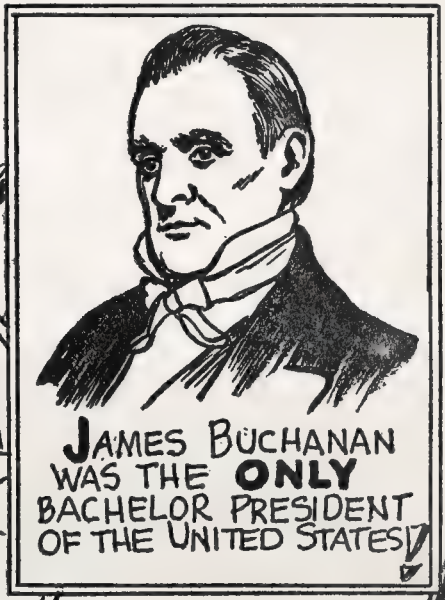
Hastings studied the youngster with new interest. "Unusual, by jove! He seems rather intelligent, too. His wish to break away from his mother's people shows ambition. And what happened here tonight indicates that he has courage to spare. You'll have him returned to the mission, I suppose?"

McKinney looked at the youngster, who stood with his hands clasped over his lean stomach, his tousled head tilted to one side, his olive-tinted face screwed into a frown of concentration as he tried to follow the conversation.

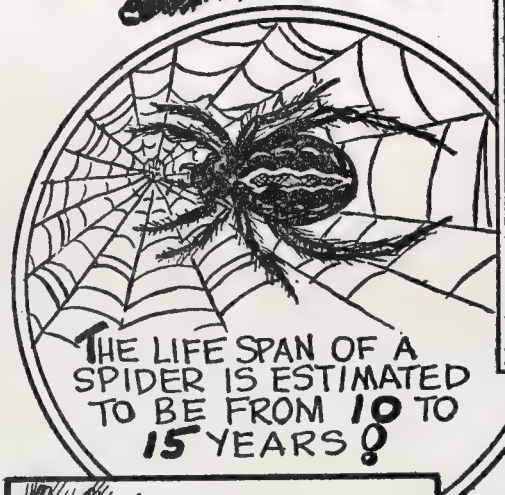
"From now on," McKinney declared, "I'm responsible for him. He deserves the best I can give him. At the mission, they named him Francis Xavier Smith. But to me," he concluded, "he'll always be Smitty —a regular guy."

Curioddities By Weill

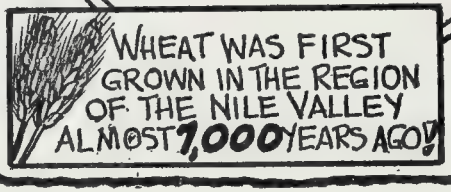
THE GIANT ELAND IS ONE OF THE MOST DIFFICULT ANIMALS TO OBTAIN IN AFRICA! THE TERRITORY IN WHICH HE LIVES IS FAR REMOVED FROM CIVILIZATION AND IS ALSO MOST UNHEALTHY. BECAUSE OF HIS SKILL IN ELUDING PURSUIT, EVEN A GLIMPSE OF HIM IS RARE!



JAMES BUCHANAN WAS THE **ONLY** BACHELOR PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES!



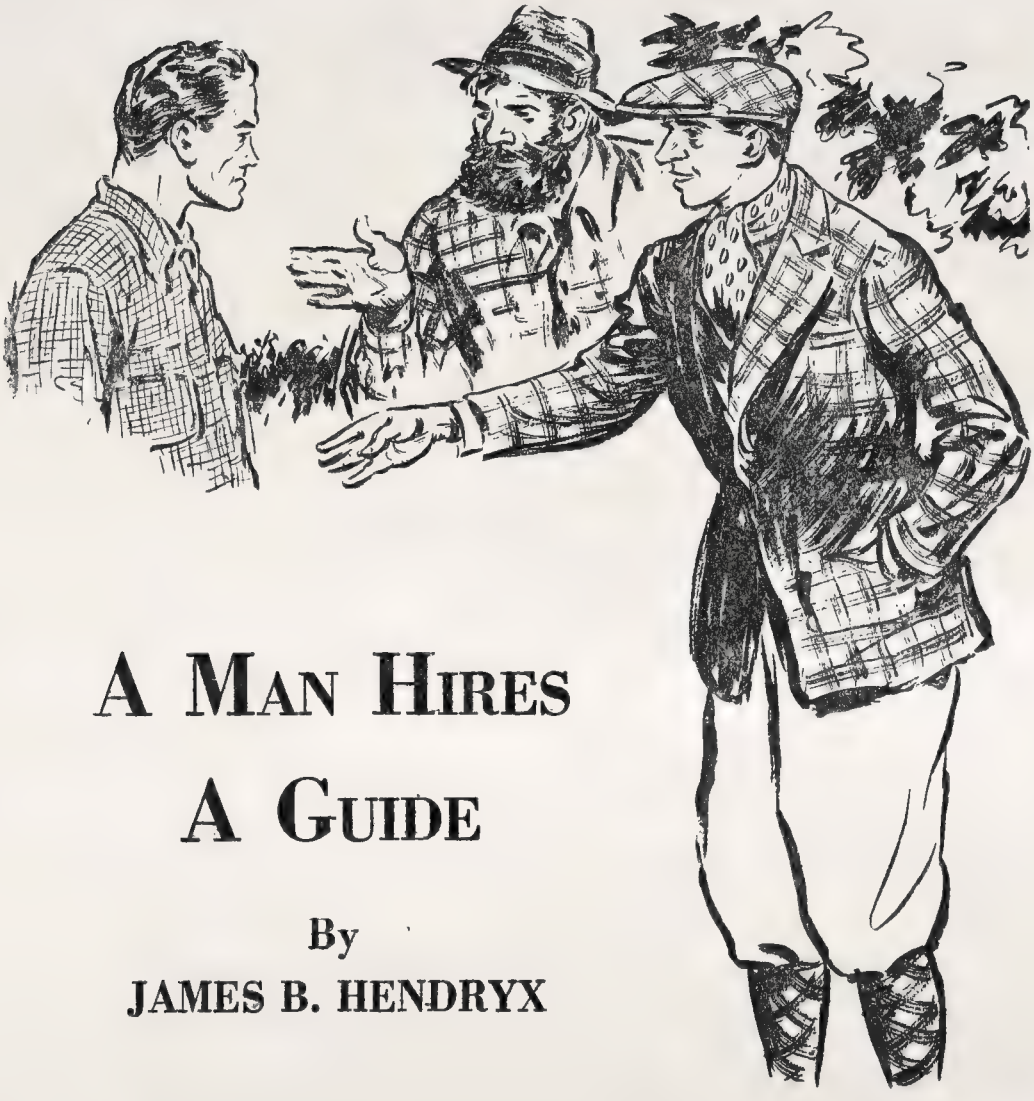
THE LIFE SPAN OF A SPIDER IS ESTIMATED TO BE FROM **10** TO **15** YEARS!



WHEAT WAS FIRST GROWN IN THE REGION OF THE NILE VALLEY ALMOST **7,000** YEARS AGO!

BECAUSE OF THE EXTREME SALINITY, FISH **CANNOT EXIST** IN THE DEAD SEA!

"Certainly," Said Old Cush. "If a Man Ain't Dead, They Can't Hang No One for Killin' Him"



A Man Hires A Guide

By

JAMES B. HENDRYX

OLD CUSH, proprietor of Cushing's Fort, the combined trading post and saloon that served the little community of outlawed men that had sprung up on Halfaday Creek hard against the Yukon-Alaska border, set out a bottle, two glasses, and inevitable leather dice box as Black John Smith crossed the floor and elevated a foot to the battered brass rail. Picking up the dice box, Black John peered into it, and waved it slowly back and forth in his hand, as he eyed the other benignly across the bar. "I tell you, Cush, these long summer days shore warms the cockles of a man's heart. When I got up this mornin' an' saw the sun peepin' over the mountains, an' breathed in the air heavy with the scent of spruce, an' heard the bees buzzin' amongst the flowers, believe me, it done my soul good."

Cush nodded, his eyes on the dice box. "Yeah? Well, listen—I seen you peek in that box, an' I'm watchin' you waggle it around. But I don't hear them dice clickin' none, an' it would do my soul more good to

hear them dice rattle before you slide 'em out, than it would to see the sun peek over a mountain, or smell a spruce, or yet to hear no bee buzz amongst a flower."

The big man grinned. "Don't you ever contemplate the beauties of nature, Cush?"

"Oh, shore. But when you've got the dice box I got somethin' else to contemplate."

"You don't mean to insinuate, I hope, that I would seek an unfair advantage?"

"Listen, John—if we was shakin' fer a hundred ounces, er a thousan' ounces, I wouldn't even bother to watch you roll 'em out. But shakin' fer the drinks there ain't no ornery trick you know, er ever heard tell of, you wouldn't pull off if you could. But it ain't no use. So roll out them dice. I'm dry."

When the glasses were filled Cush glanced into the face of the big man. "An' speakin' of crooks, John, I wouldn't trust that there damn cuss that moved into Olson's old shack—him that calls hisself George W. Penrose—no further'n what I could throw a bull by the tail."

"Has some act of his aroused your suspicion?"

"Jest lookin' at him anyone would know he's some kind of a crook. Look at them clothes he's rigged out in—long stockin's like wimmin wears, only his'n got black an' red an' yaller, an' green all wove into 'em, an' them baggy bisickle pants—when there ain't a bisickle within a thousan' mile of here. An' stickin' that there W in the middle of his name! What would anyone give a damn if it was W er P er Q? You don't see none of the other boys on the crick saltin' letters in the middle of their name—like Pot Gut W John, er Black H John. An' besides, he kin git off damn near as many big words as what you do. An' on top of all that he's packin' a roll of bills that would choke a moose. An' you know damn well no guy like him could have got them bills honest."

Black John grinned. "I fear, Cush, that on the premises you've stated, your thesis is untenable. It is an incontrovertible fact that sartorial idiosyncrasies differ perceptibly, even as personalities differ."

"I got to git a new bar rag," Cush said, eyeing the cloth with which he was mopping the bar. "This un's about wore out."

The big man's grin broadened. "The observation, obviously practical as it may be, seems somehow irrelevant to the matter under discussion."

CUSH scowled across the bar. "Listen—you go ahead an' say all the big words you kin remember an' make up a lot of new ones, an' when you git 'em all said, I'll mebbe have the bar chores done, an' we'll shake fer another drink. An' in the meanwhile, you know jest as well as I do that this here George W. Penrose ain't nothin' but a tinhorn. So fer, he's had pretty good luck playin' stud—an' I'm givin' you fair warnin' that the first crooked move he makes in here, I'm goin' to bust him so hard with a bung starter that I'll knock that there W clean out through the back of his head."

"Takin' George by an' large, as the sayin' is, I'm inclined to agree that he ain't no beneficial addition to our community. An' admittin' that a crooked move in a card game would constitute an overt act of skullduggery, your use of the bung starter to correct such irregularity would ondoubtless be permissible."

"Whammin' some damn cuss over the head with a bung starter don't call fer no oration—even if I already done it," Cush growled. "An' besides this here George W. Penrose settlin' down on us, One Armed John claims they's a woman moved in on Owl Crick. By God, if it ain't one thing, it's two! Every time some woman shows up on Halfaday there's hell to pay!"

Black John grinned. "We don't have to worry about her. She's old Job Benson's daughter. Ella May, her name is. You know Job relocated Jake Zilkie's claim over on Owl Crick after Jake got knocked off by that damn Zeke Towler. He left Ella May in Dawson to finish her schoolin' when he moved in last fall. An' this spring jest before the clean-up he went down an' fetched her up. I've known Ella May ever sence she was two year old—used to live down to Forty Mile, an' Beetles an' me, an' Camillo Bill used to carry her around in our packsacks. Then after Carmack made his strike, Job moved up to Dawson an' I'd see her on the street now an' then. Fine lookin' girl now—must be goin' on nineteen, twenty.

"It was me tipped Job off to the Zilkie

claim. I'd ruther see a sourdough located on Owl Crick than some damn chechako. He'd ort to do well there, too. Zilkie took better than thirty thousan' out of that claim before he was murdered, an' it ain't nowheres near worked out."

"It's one thing if they're two—but if they're nineteen, twenty an' good lookin', to boot—it's somethin' else agin," Cush replied lugubriously, as he mopped a few drops of liquor from the bar. "What I claim, any woman kin raise hell with a crick."

The big man laughed. "You're a born woman-hater, Cush."

"Born—hell! I wish I had of be'n! What with four wives—an' plenty others that wasn't—I learnt to hate 'em the hard way! An' I'm tellin' you, John, it would be too bad if old Job Benson's gal should fall fer that damn tinhorn. He's got a smooth tongue in his head. An' he ain't so bad lookin'—in a barbershop sort of a way."

"She'll prob'ly get a chance to look him over one of these days," Black John replied. "I run acrost old Job the other day when I was moose huntin', an' he said he had his dump about sluiced out an' he'd be over fer a game of stud an' some supplies in about a week. Ella May'll prob'ly come along with him. But she's a sourdough, Ella May is. She wouldn't fall fer no tinhorn chechako, no matter what he looked like, nor how smooth he talked. Accordin' to Job, she's kind of caked in on young Sam Evans, that's located on that gulch that runs into the White about a mile above the mouth of Halfaday. Sam's made the trip up to Owl Crick several times since Ella May got there. Job claims he's a likely enough young feller—fer a chechako. Sort of slow like—but a good steady worker. Got a good thing there in that gulch, too, accordin' to Job. He sort of favors the match."

"Wimmin ain't got no sense," Cush replied with stubborn conviction, and as his glance strayed past Black John, he nodded toward the open doorway. "Speak of the devil, as the Good Book says, an' up he pops. There comes Job now. The gal's along with him—an' so's that there Sam Evans."

BLACK JOHN'S voice boomed heartily as the three stepped into the room. "Belly right up to the bar, folks! The house is buyin' one. An' by gosh, if it ain't little Ella May! Seems like you get prettier an' prettier as time goes on. Remember how us boys used to carry you around in our packsacks down to Forty Mile?"

"Indeed I do!" the girl laughed. "I used to think you were the grandest men in the world."

"Hell—we was! We are yet, fer that matter. Job tells me he left you down to Dawson to finish your schoolin'. I s'pose by now you've learnt all there is to know."

"I'm just beginning to learn how terribly much I don't know—and never will know," the girl smiled.

"There's hope for you yet, then," the big man announced, and was interrupted by Benson, who turned, glass in hand.

"Come on, fill up, John! Here's lookin' at you!"

Cush shoved the bottle over. "If a good lookin' woman shows up, John even fergits to drink." He glanced at the girl, hesitated, then reached to the back bar for another glass. "Would you jine us in a little snort, mam?" he asked. "It's on the house."

"No thank you," she smiled. "So Uncle John's a lady-killer, is he? Well, well!"

"Don't you believe a word that old coot says," the big man grinned, as he filled his glass.

"Sometime John's goin' to run acrost one he'll wisht to God he had killed the first minute he seen her," Cush replied forebodingly, and never cracked a smile as the others roared with laughter.

"Finish your clean-up, Job?" the big man asked, as the glasses were emptied and refilled.

"Yup. Finished her up yesterday. An' I'm shore obliged to you, John, fer tippin' me off to that location. It's about the best thing I've struck, yet."

"I figured it was good. An' it would have be'n too damn bad if some chechako had blundered onto it. What I claim, us sourdoughs has got to stick together." Passing up the second drink, young Evans turned from the bar, and out of the tail of his eye, Black John saw him and the girl slip unobtrusively from the room. He jerked a thumb toward the departing pair. "Figure they'll make a go of it?" he asked.

Old Job grinned. "Sometimes I do. An'

then agin, sometimes I don't know. Looks to me like he's awful damn slow with his courtin'. Comes up to Owl Crick every Sunday, but he don't seem to know what to do when he gits there.

"He's got a good claim an' he's a good stidy worker. Ella May ain't no damn fool. She's lived along the rivers all her life, an' she's took in the whole show. She's seen men go to hell by the whiskey route, an' others by gamblin'. She's seen rich men turned into bums, an' bums into rich men. An' she knows there's a happy mejium between 'em. She knows that the men who really count in this country ain't neither saints, nor sinners. Us sourdoughs we cut loose now an' then with our drinkin' and our card playin' an' mebbe whoop her up fer a day er two. But we don't do it too often—an' we do a hell of a lot of hard work in between.

"She shore as hell wouldn't want to hook up with no gamblin', whiskey-lushin', woman-chasin' high binder—nor yet she wouldn't want to saddle herself with no saint. She don't drink none, but she does like to go to dances, an' shows, an' have a good time, an' it ain't no more'n right that she should. This here Sam ain't no hell-raiser. Usta sort of hang around Ella May back in Dawson last fall. He don't drink nothin' to speak of. Never seen him hangin' around no wimmin, nor playin' cards. He come up last fall an' located on that gulch after I located on Owl Crick.

"Seems like all he wants to do is work his claim week days, an' come up an' set around lookin' at Ella May on Sundays. I don't know what the hell's holdin' him back. Anyone kin see he's crazy about her—jest the way he sets an' looks at her an' hangs on every word she says. If he had any sense he'd know she'd take him the minute he asked her—the way she plays up to him. But the damn fool don't ask her."

"Drink up, an' have another," Black John said. "Give him time, an' he'll get around to it, one of these days."

"Time—hell!" old Job retorted. "It was a damn sight different when I married my wife. Married her the first time I ever seen her. Yup—over on the Mackenzie, it was. I was makin' a livin' along the river, prospectin', trappin', doin' a little fur tradin', an' what-not, an' her old man run a tradin' post at the mouth of the Arctic Red. I come along one day in a canoe, headin' north. Figgered I'd mebbe try my luck whalin' if I could connect up along the coast. But when I seen Angela I says 'to hell with whalin' '—an' I up an' ask her to marry me."

Black John grinned. "Just like that, eh? Up an' asked her to marry you the minute you seen her?"

"Well—not the first minute. She was there on the bank mendin' a net when I come along. I drug my canoe out an' set there beside her. It's a hot day, an' we're settin' there in the sun on some empty fish boxes chawin' the fat, like young folks does, an' I figgered she's the prettiest gal I ever seen. So I asked her to marry me. She says she'd shore like to, but her old man's promised her to Sim Grayton, which he was the trader down to Good Hope, an' the orneriest old coot along the river.

"I asks her if she wants to marry him, an' she claims she'd ruther be dead. She says as long as her ma was alive things was all right—but she hadn't be'n dead more'n a month till the old man promised her to Grayton. I asks her why he would want to marry her off to a damn cuss like him an' she kinda shrugs an' says how Grayton's got plenty of money, an' she guesses the old man's practically sellin' her.

"The old man, he's slipped up behind the fish boxes, onbeknownst to us, an' he hears what she says. 'It's a damn lie!' he yells, an' orders her to go to the house. He tells me to mind my own business an' git to hell outa there. 'I'm takin' yer word fer it,' I says. 'I'm mindin' my business. An' my business right now is takin' Angela where Sim Grayton'll never lay a hand on her—an' we're both gettin' to hell outa here!'

"He reached fer an ice spud that was layin' there, but he didn't quite make it. I ketched him a sock on the jaw that rocked him back on his heels, an' then we went to it.

"He wasn't no easy meat in no man's language—bigger'n I was, an' hard as green ice. I wasn't by no means soft, myself, an' we fought fer damn near an hour—punchin', kickin', jabbin'. I know'd if he ever got them big arms around me an' got me down I was a goner, so I kep' out of his reach, dancin' around him an' punchin' every sec-

ond—not darin' to give him a minute's rest to git his wind back.

"Finally he begin to slow up an' his punches wasn't landin' so hard. I was damn near winded myself, when I seen my chanct, an' stepped in an' planted a punch that landed jest under his ear. It must of damn near broke his neck the way his head popped sideways, an' his arms dropped, an' his knees sagged, an' he pitched forward onto his face, cuttin' his forehead on the corner of a fish box.

"He was plumb out, an' after seein' he was breathin' all right, Angela run to the house an' throw'd her stuff in a packsack, an' we throw'd it into my canoe an' shoved off, after smashin' the only two canoes the old man had. We hit back downriver, an' stopped at Norman an' got married by the priest, an' then hit up the Gravel, an' come on acrost the divide an' on down the Stewart to the Yukon."

The man paused and downed his drink. "I ain't never made no real strike," he added, after a pause, "but me an' Angela was always happy together, takin' the good with the bad—an' up to the time she died, two years ago, come September, neither one of us ever regretted fer a minute what we'd done. Fill up. I'm buyin' a drink."

"Did the old man come to?" Cush asked, as he shoved the bottle along.

"Damn if I know," Job grinned. "If he didn't, he's be'n onconscious fer a hell of a while."

"Sech method ondoubtless has its advantages," Black John opined, "bein', as you might say, abrupt rather than dilatory, or sedate. But on the other hand, where circumstances permits, I believe the consensus of opinion would favor a more protracted an' less abrupt courtship. Like I said, give Sam time, an' he'll pop the question."

Behind the bar Cush nodded lugubriously. "I ain't got no big words to git off, like John has—but like he says—give Evans rope enough, an' he'll hang hisself."

Black John grinned. "Cush regards matrimony as a snare an' a delusion."

"I don't know nothin' about no illusions," Cush growled, "but agin a man's be'n snared four times, he——" The words died on his lips, at the sound of a shot, and then another, and another. "What the hell's that?" he exclaimed.

BLACK JOHN turned and started for the door. Old Job halted him with a laugh. "Don't git excited," he said. "It ain't nothin' but Sam an' Ella May out there somewheres shootin' at a mark. He's got a little old thirty-two revolver an' his idee of a hell of a good time is to git Ella May out somewheres shootin' at tin cans, an' what-not. I figger if Sam don't make no better headway than what he has up to now, Ella May's liable to up an' marry someone else, jest to spite him."

A shadow darkened the doorway, and Black John regarded the newcomer with a grin.

"Well, well! If it ain't little Lord Fauntleroy himself! Step right up to the bar an' meet my old friend, Job Benson. Job, this dressy gent is George W. Penrose, a newcomer amongst us, that's located down in Olson's old shack."

Penrose smiled as he joined the others at the bar, and filled the glass Cush slid toward him. "Glad to meet you, Benson. But as for being dressy—I wear this outfit for comfort, not for looks."

Old Job eyed the gaudy stockings and baggy knickerbockers. "I wouldn't take no comfort in a rig like that," he opined. "Be afraid of gittin' hung up by the seat of my pants on a stub. Throw that one into you. I'm buyin' a round."

One Armed John drifted in, and shortly thereafter Pot Gutted John and Red John joined the party. Several rounds of drinks were had, and old Job suggested a stud game. "Last time I was here you boys took me fer right around thirty ounces, an' now, by gravy, I aim to git it back, an' thirty more on top of it."

Black John grinned. "That seems like a laudable enterprise. What with One Armed John tendin' bar, we'll have a nice six-handed game. Fetch out the chips an' cards, Cush, an' we'll be gittin' at it. Job, he's shore entitled to his revenge."

The game had proceeded uneventfully for an hour when young Evans stepped into the room and ignoring the card game, crossed to the bar where One Armed John set out a bottle and glass. Glancing from beneath his hat brim from time to time, the big man noted that the liquor line on the bottle was lowering steadily. At the end of another hour Ella May paused for a moment

in the doorway and, advancing to the table, stood beside her father's chair.

"Have you ordered the supplies yet, Daddy?" she asked.

Old Job lifted a corner of his hole card, glanced at the pip, and pushed it away. He looked up with a smile. "Cripes, no! I ain't give 'em a thought. Plenty time to git the supplies. We ain't pullin' out this evenin'. I've got a job here that looks like it'll take all night to finish it."

The girl smiled. "I'll bet you have! Well—have a good time. But don't drink too much or you won't feel like hitting out tomorrow."

Cush shoved his hand into the discards and glanced up. "Go around to the kitchen an' tell the klooch I says to fry you up a nice thick moose steak. That quarter's hung jest long enough to be good. An' tell her to fix you up with a room fer the night. An' tell her I says after she's et, to fetch in a big hunk of that there cheese, an' four, five links of summer sausage, an' some mustard, an' couple loaves of bread an' set 'em there on the bar where we kin lunch off'n 'em."

Penrose pushed the last of his chips into the pot, and glanced across at Red John, who was eyeing the cards. "Raise you fifty," he said.

Red John hesitated a moment, and shoved five blue chips into the pot. "Call you."

Penrose laughed. "Your pair of nines win," he said. "I thought maybe my queen and jack would make you lay 'em down. Oh, well—it's all in a lifetime. Easy come, easy go, as the fellow says. Give me another stack, Cush." Reaching into his pocket, he withdrew a huge roll of bills, and with a flourish, stripped off five one hundreds and shoved them across to Cush. He smiled across at Job, who was gathering the cards for the deal. "You might introduce me to your daughter," he said. "It isn't every day, or even every month, a man sees as pretty a girl as she is—especially around a dump like this."

"Why shore." Job slightly mellowed with liquor, smiled good naturedly. "Thought everyone along the crick know'd Ella May. Daughter, this here's Penrose W. Fauntleroy—er mebbe it's Fauntleroy W. Penrose—damn if I rec'lect which."

The other laughed. "George W. Penrose," he corrected. "The Fauntleroy part was just a pleasantry of Black John's—sort of kidding me about my clothes. I'll bet you don't see anything out of the way with them."

ACROSS the table Black John noted that the girl's eyes flashed for a split second on the young man who stood drinking alone at the bar. He noted also that the young man's lips tightened slightly at the corners, as he had listened to the words of the gambler. Then the eyes of the girl flashed on Penrose were dancing, and she laughed lightly.

"Of course, I don't! I'll bet Uncle John don't, either. He's just jealous—that's all. I'll bet if he knew where he could find it, he'd buy an outfit like that, right now!"

"An' wouldn't I be a sight for sore eyes, walkin' down Front Street—black beard, stockin's like a July sunset, an' the seat of my pants damn near draggin' the sidewalk! Cripes, if Downey'd see me he'd run me out of town!"

The girl laughed and turned toward the door. "I'm hungry as a bear. Guess I'll go and see about that big moose steak."

The game proceeded with one or another dropping out for a few minutes to visit the bar where the Indian woman had set out the cold lunch. Young Evans had quit the bar and seated himself in a chair at a window that looked out toward the landing. The sun hung low in the west, throwing long dark shadows of the surrounding spruce trees across the clearing. Through the doorway Black John caught a glimpse of Ella May walking slowly toward the creek bank. Penrose saw her, too, as he turned from the bar where he had been lunching on summer sausage and mustard. Instead of returning to the table, he strolled out and joined her, and together they made their way to the edge of the high bank and seated themselves on a log that commanded a superb view of a long reach of the creek winding through the little valley. From where Black John sat the two were in plain sight; they were in plain sight, too, of the young man who sat alone at the window. From time to time, as the sound of light laughter floated on the still air, the big man's glance shifted to the silent figure in the chair. He noted that the eyes seemed riveted upon the two figures

seated close together on the log, and that the lips were compressed into a thin straight line.

The sun went down. A pale half-moon brightened with the deepening dusk as the two rose from the log and, side by side, approached across the clearing. The girl passed around to the rear, and Penrose resumed his seat at the table.

Grimly Black John noted, as the game proceeded, that Penrose was deliberately favoring old Job in the play. Several times when he suspected that the older man held good cards, Penrose deliberately boosted the pot until others dropped out, then, on Job's next bet, instead of calling or raising, folded his hand and tossed it into the discards, as the oldster raked in the pot.

It was three o'clock when the game broke up, and the men returned to their cabins. Job spread his blankets in the storeroom, and Black John stepped to the window where young Evans had fallen asleep in his chair, evidently the worse for his solitary drinking bout. Rousing the boy after much shaking, he smiled into the stupidly blinking eyes. "Better come along with me, son," he said. "I got an extry bunk in my cabin. 'Tain't only a few steps, an' you can roll in an' get a good night's sleep. A man can't get no proper rest slunched in a chair. Cripes, yer neck would be stiff as a board in the mornin', with yer head lolled over like it was."

The lad stared about him, his glance centering on Cush, who was lowering the big swinging lamp over the bar. "Where's the rest of 'em?" he asked, passing a hand across his bewildered forehead.

"The game busted up an' they all hit fer their shacks. Cush, he's goin' to roll in—an' me, too. Come on. Cush is about to blow out the light."

"But—Job, and—and . . ."

"They're all right, son. Job, he's crawled in his blankets an' the klooch she looked after Ella May, like Cush told her. You'll see 'em in the mornin'."

II

IT WAS late the following morning when Black John awoke. He cooked and ate his breakfast without waking the younger man who slept like a log despite the sounds of rattling stove lids and sizzling steak. Leaving him asleep, the big man strolled over to the saloon where Cush set out the bottle, dice box, and glasses. "Where's Job?" he asked.

"He's gone. Got his supplies an' pulled out an hour ago—him an' the girl. Claimed he's gittin' too old fer more'n one night's drinkin' an' card playin' in a row. He was feelin' good, barrin' a headache he claimed he had, on account he won back them thirty ounces we took him fer the last time he was here, an' ten ounces on top of 'em."

Black John picked up the dice box. "I've got a kind of a bad taste in my mouth myself, this mornin'. We'll make it one shake instead of horses fer the drinks. Beat them three sixes," he added, as he rolled the dice onto the bar.

Cush failed to beat the throw, and shoved the bottle across the bar. "Seems like Penrose played a kinda funny game, last night," he said. "He laid down to Job, two, three

times, when I'd of bet my shirt he had him beat—an' one time when I know he had. I seen his discards. He tossed away a pair of treys with a trey in the hole, when the best Job could of had was a pair of kings, what without no pair showin'. Penrose played like a damn fool."

Black John nodded. "Yeah. Only he don't know it. He figured it was smart."

"Smart! What's so damn smart about tossin' away the winnin' hand an' lettin' someone else take the pot? Accordin' to that, the smarter a man is, the less he could win!"

"I didn't say it was smart. I said Penrose figured it was. He figured on playin' up to Job—sort of favorin' him, on account of the girl."

"Yeah, an' by God, didn't I tell you wimmin ain't got no sense? Cripes—her fallin' for a damn tinhorn like Penrose, when anyone with even the brains God give geese would know this here young Evans is worth a dozen of him!"

"You figure she fell for him, eh?"

"Fell fer him! 'Course she fell fer him. I take notice it was him she set out there on that log with all evenin'—not Evans. She fell fer him when she first seen him, there at the card table. She begun laughin' an' kiddin' with him, soon's old Job made 'em acquainted. Why she even stuck up fer that blamed monkey suit he wears—when he told her you'd be'n kiddin' him about it. An' young Evans standin' there at the bar throwin' whiskey into him he didn't want, an' eyein' her like a cow which had lost his calf."

"A cow loses *her* calf—not *his*," Black John grinned.

"Yeah? Well how about it if it was a bull calf that got lost? An' besides, if Evans was a cow, it would be his calf he was losin' an' not her him."

"Your reasonin' is entirely too abstruse for me to comprehend at this time of the mornin'. I'll ponder it at my leisure. But to return to the crux of the matter. Ella May Benson is a sourdough. She was born an' raised right here in the Yukon. An' you bet, she knows her nuggets. You don't need to be afraid she'd ever fall for a guy like Penrose, even if he talked twict as slick, an' dressed twict as gaudy."

"I s'pose that there log-settin' in the moonlight ain't no sign she's fell fer him, eh? That on top of the way she throw'd them big blue eyes at him an' kidded with him there at the table?"

BLACK JOHN eyed the other speculatively. "Cush," he asked, "do you know the difference between strategy an' tactics?"

"No. An' what's more, I don't give a damn. Every time you git cornered, you reel off a lot of big words that no one don't know what they mean. I ain't never heard about no strategy, but every kid knows tick-tacks is a string with a rock tied on it you make a noise on winders with."

"I said tactics, not tick-tacks."

"I heard you, but I figgered, what with all the big words you git off, yer bound to git some of 'em hind side to. An' besides, what's all that got to do with Penrose, an' the girl, an' this here young Evans?"

"If I can read the signs, it's got a hell of a lot to do with 'em. Listen, Cush—you heard what Job said about young Evans goin' up to Owl Crick every Sunday to see Ella May, an' then jest moonin' around, an' wastin' his time teachin' her to shoot at a mark with a pistol. An' likewise you heard him express the opinion that she'd take him the minute he asked her."

"Yeah, an' likewise I heard him say that if he don't hurry up an' ask her, she's liable to marry someone else, jest fer to spite him. Well, what I claim, this here damn Penrose is the one which she will marry. By God, a woman will do anything fer spite!"

"She ain't figurin' on marryin' Penrose," Black John insisted. "She's jest playin' up to him to make Evans jealous—to sort of spur him into poppin' the question. She saw Evans standin' there by the bar when she came in, an' listenin', when she was kiddin' with Penrose, an' likewise after supper, she knew he was sittin' there at the window when she walked acrost the clearin'. She prob'ly figured he'd be the one to go out an' set there watchin' the sunset with her—but when Penrose went out instead, she grabbed the chanct to use him to make her play for Evans. It's like I said—about strategy an' tactics. Strategy is layin' out a campaign in its broader aspects, to accomplish a purpose—in this case Ella May's purpose is to marry young Evans. Tactics is the means used to accomplish the purpose—like her playin' up to Penrose in order to jolt Evans into askin' her to marry him."

"Huh," Cush grunted. "If she's so hell-bent on marryin' him, why don't she come right out an' tell him so, an' then go hunt up a preacher er a jestice an' git married?"

"Well, cripes, Cush—a girl likes the courtin' to be the other way around. She

can't just up an' tell a man she wants to marry him."

"The hell an' she can't! My second wife didn't wait fer me to do no courtin', an' she didn't fool around with none of them there tactics an' stratums, neither! I went acrost the river to Covington one night, an' got a little tight, an' when we woke up next mornin' she claimed we'd got married. Hell, I didn' rec'lect even seein' her before! But she was a good looker, so I took her word fer it."

"Cripes! Didn't you check up on it?"

"No. You see, we got up kinda late, that mornin', and I was due to go on shift at eleven o'clock where I was tendin' bar over in Cincinnati, so we had to hustle. I showed her where my room was over the saloon, an' she moved in. I figgered on gittin' the papers on it when I got time. But it's jest one of them things a man keeps puttin' off, an' bein' as I didn't git over to Covington very often, I never got around to it. Didn't make no difference, nohow—hell, we hadn't lived together more'n six months er so, till she skipped out with a B. and O. conductor."

YOUNG Evans paused for a moment in the doorway, glanced about the room, and crossed to the bar. "Where's Job?" he asked.

"They pulled out—him an' the girl," Cush replied, as he slid a glass across the bar and shoved the bottle over. "Have one on the house."

Evans eyed the bottle and retched. "I couldn't take a drink of that damn stuff this morning if I was to be shot for passin' it up! Had too much of it, last night, I guess. Even the sight of it makes me sick." Reaching into his pocket, he withdrew a paper and tossed it onto the bar. "There's my list of supplies," he said. "When you get 'em put up, I'll be pulling out, too."

Cush glanced at the paper and handed it back. "Someone's comin'," he said. "I hear a noise down to the landin' an' I'll be busy fer a while in here. You go on in the storeroom an' help yerself. The stuff's in there on the shelves. Lay it in a pile on the floor, an' when yer through I'll check it over."

As the young man disappeared through the storeroom door, Cush glanced toward the clearing. "Here comes that damn Penrose agin," he said, in a tone meant to carry to the storeroom. "Prob'ly come back to make another play fer old Job's girl."

Penrose stepped to the bar and ranged himself beside Black John. "How's everyone this morning?" he asked, smiling into the faces of the two. Drawing a roll of bills from his pocket, he stripped one off and tossed it onto the bar. "Let's have a little snort. You boys put a nick in my roll, last night—but I can still buy a drink." He paused and glanced about the room. "I suppose old Job's still asleep, eh?"

"No. He got his stuff an' pulled out early."

"Pulled out!" There was a note of disappointment in the tone. "And—Ella May? I suppose she went with him?"

Cush nodded. "Yeah, she went along."

As the drinks were poured, a slight sound drew Black John's glance to the "peek-hole," a narrow slot in the partition wall placed just beneath a shelf in a manner that rendered it invisible to anyone in the saloon who did not know of its existence, yet gave a perfect view of the entire barroom. He noted that a pair of eyes were glued to the slot.

"Damn good looker—Ella May," Penrose said, with a wink at Black John, as he filled his glass.

The big man nodded. "Yeah—she ain't so hard to look at."

"Plenty lively, too. Boy, those eyes of hers would get any man going—the way she can shoot 'em around! That's the way I like 'em—full of pep and vinegar. Told me she lives over on Owl Crick—wherever that is."

"Yeah. Job's workin' a location over there."

"Far from here, is it?"

"Well, it ain't so far in miles acrost country. A man would have to know the trail, though. There's a couple of swamps to get through. It's further by canoe—down Half-aday an' up the White, an' then a piece up Owl Crick."

Penrose was silent for a moment. "This Owl Crick?' he asked. "There must be lots of cricks running into the White. How would a man know when he got there, in case he went by canoe?"

"He wouldn't. The Government ain't got around to puttin' up sign posts yet. If a man had a guide that knows the country he

wouldn't have no trouble. Figurin' on goin' over there?"

"You're damned right I'm goin' over there! You don't catch me passing up a jane like her. You don't run across that kind every day. I'm going over there and make my play fer her."

"Figure on marryin' her, eh?"

"Marrying her! Hell, no! You don't have to marry 'em to get 'em—if you know your stuff. Give me a couple of more evenings with her and I'll have her eating out of my hand.

"Figure on fetchin' her down to Olson's shack?"

"Hell, no! There's no profit in that. I'll take her straight through to Dawson. Cuter Malone will have to pay through the nose for her."

Black John nodded. "But how about Job? He might not like her goin' off with you, like that."

Penrose gave a contemptuous snort. "What—that old hick! Hell, I'll take liquor enough up there to get him oiled, and leave enough there to keep him oiled, and he won't know she's gone for a week. About a guide, now? He'd have to be someone that could keep his eyes and ears shut—and know enough to forget he'd even made the trip. I'll pay damn good money for the right man. Know anyone that would fill the bill?"

Black John pondered the question for several moments. "Yeah, there's a young fella that knows that Owl Crick country like a book. Name's Evans—Sam Evans. Kinda slow like, Sam is—sometimes too damn slow for his own good—'specially with women. Mebbe you noticed him last evenin'. He come in while we was playin' cards, an' histed a few drinks here at the bar."

Penrose nodded. "Yes, I believe I did notice him. Didn't pay any attention to him, though. You think he'd be okay?"

"I can't think of no one I'd rather recommend fer that particular trip," Black John replied. "He don't never go around soundin' off his bazoo, an' he can be depended on to do the right thing."

"That suits me to a dot. Where can I find him?"

Black John smiled. "You won't have to go far. He's back in the storeroom, right now, gettin' his supplies together. You got here just in time, too. Sam, he figured on pullin' out pretty quick. He's got a location of his own, somewheres over on the White." Stepping to the storeroom door, Black John raised his voice. "Sam! Hey, Sam! You in there!"

"Yeah—I'm here!"

"Come on out. There's a fella out here wants to hire a guide. He'll pay damn good money, he claims. Wants to make a trip over to Owl Crick. I told him you know'd that country." He returned to the bar, and as Evans came toward him he noted that the young man's face seemed a shade paler than usual, that his eyes had narrowed to slits, and that his lips were pressed into a thin white line. "Sam," he said, "this is George W. Penrose."

Penrose smiled into the granite-like face of the younger man. "Glad to know you, Sam," he said. "I've got a little job of guiding for you. It won't take but a few days. I want to go up to Owl Crick. May hang around there a day or two—the back to the river. Won't need you for the trip down the White. An ounce a day is going wages for guides. I'll pay you four ounces a day. Black John tells me you can be depended on to do the right thing—to forget whatever you see and hear—forget that you ever made the trip, even. Is that right?"

THE narrowed eyes met the other's glance squarely. "I'll do the right thing, all right. I can't promise to forget I made the trip. But I can promise not to go shootin' off my mouth about what happens. You can depend on that."

"That's good enough for me," Penrose said. "I'm camping in Olson's old shack, down the crick. We can drop down and spend the night there, and hit out for Owl Crick in the morning. You can bring your supplies along and leave them there till the trip's over and then pick 'em up. That will save you doubling back up here for them."

The other nodded. "Okay. I'll be ready pretty quick."

An hour later, after the two had departed, Cush shoved the bottle across to Black John. "Say," he breathed, "did you see them eyes of his'n—an' how white his face was, an' his mouth pressed thin as a crack in a glass? A man would think he'd stud here an' heard

every word Penrose said—about old Job's girl."

The big man nodded. "He heard it, all right—every damn word of it. I could see his eyes, there at the peek-hole. I believe he can be trusted to do the right thing."

Cush tossed off his drink and refilled his glass. "I need another," he said. "By God, a man feels like worshin' out his mouth jest standin' here an' listenin' to a damn cuss like him talk about that girl the way he done. I'd ort to of split his head with the bung starter! I shore hope young Evans didn't waste all the shells fer that there pistol of his'n shootin' at a mark."

Black John grinned. "You don't mean to say you'd condone a shootin' on Halfaday?"

"What I claim Evans ort to be hung if he *don't* shoot him—the way he talked about sellin' his girl to Cuter Malone!"

"An' if he does, the boys might call a miner's meetin' an' hang him."

"Like hell they'll hang him! Jest let 'em try it! By God, I'm the coroner around here, an' they can't hang no one fer killin' no one that I don't claim is dead. We'd have to hold an inquest. An' I wouldn't say that damn Penrose was dead if he was shot through the heart, an' his head was smashed in with a club, an' he was drownded in the crick, to boot! An' if a man ain't dead they can't hang no one fer killin' him!"

Black John grinned broadly. "Anyhow, we don't have to cross no bridges till we get to 'em. From here, the arrangement seems eminently satisfactory."

III

IT WAS nearly noon the next day when One Armed John, chest heaving, and eyes fairly bulging from their sockets, burst into the saloon where Cush and Black John were shaking dice for the drinks. "Down to Olson's old shack!" he managed to gasp, between breaths, "Downey—he's in there—sawin' his head off!"

Black John paused, dice box in hand, and regarded the man with a frown. "You full of hooch?" he asked.

"I ain't had a drink sence yesterday! He's in there, I tell you! I seen him! He's sawin' it off with a meat saw—right clost above the eyes." Cush scowled across the bar. "Why would Downey be sawin' his head off?" he asked.

"Not *his* head! Penrose's!"

"Oh," Cush shifted his glance to Black John. "You ain't beat them three fives yet," he said. "Well, Penrose needed killin' if anyone ever did. But it looks like a kinda clumsy way of killin' a man, at that."

"I figger Penrose was dead a'ready," One Armed John explained. "I was fishin' down

there, an' I come around the bend an' seen another canoe pulled up beside Penrose's, so I snuck up an' peeked through the winder, an' damn if there wasn't Downey down on his knees on the floor sawin' away on Penrose's head, an' Penrose was jest layin' still an' not squirmin' around none, like anyone would if someone was sawin' their head—so I figger he must of be'n dead."

"Your reasonin' seems logical," Black John admitted, and cast the dice. "There's three sixes to beat your fives, Cush. I'm throwin' this drink into me, an' headin' for the hills to see if I can get me a moose. I just happened to think, my meat's runnin' low. If Downey shows up, tell him I'll be back sometime this evenin'. An' if he goes to askin' any questions, you don't know the answers to none of 'em—see?"

Black John crossed the creek, and ascending to the rim, struck across country for the gulch in which Evans had located his claim. He arrived at the shack just as the young man was swinging a well-filled packsack into his canoe.

"Hello, Sam!" he greeted. "Goin' someplace?" Without waiting for a reply, he continued. "One Armed John come into Cush's a while back. He'd be'n fishin' down the crick. Claimed he run acrost Corporal

Downey down to Penrose's shack."

The younger man shrugged. "I killed him," he said in a dull voice. "I'm glad I did. I'll take what's coming to me."

The big man smiled. "What's comin' to you hadn't ort to be so hard to take, son—if you work it right."

"What do you mean? I killed Penrose. And the police will call it murder, I guess. And maybe it is. But he had it coming. Anyway, it saved Ella May—and maybe a lot of other girls, too. I heard what he said, back there in Cush's yesterday. But that wasn't a patch on what he told me after we'd got down there. Do you know what his business was? It was selling women—young girls, mostly, to places like Cuter Malone's Klondike Palace. I didn't know there were any such rotten, low-lived men living as Penrose. And he sat there after we'd had supper, last night, and bragged about it. Told about how he'd operated in New Orleans, and San Francisco, and Seattle—how he'd hang around dance halls, and take girls out and get 'em drunk and—well—you can guess the rest. And he said when the law got to crowding him too close he came up here. The more he talked, the more I hated him, and then when he started in on Ella May—what he was going to do, and all—something seemed to blow up inside my head, and I jerked my pistol out of my pocket. He saw me do it, and grabbed up the iron poker, and I fired, and he dropped there on the floor. I don't think I even took aim. But the bullet caught him right between the eyes. He fell, and the blood ran down the floor in a slow red stream.

"I never wanted to kill anyone before. But I wanted to kill him—for what he said about—about Ella May—and those other girls, too. He didn't even know that I knew Ella May, I guess, or he wouldn't have told me those things. But—I love Ella May. I wanted to marry her and bring her here to live—just us two. I wanted to tell her I loved her—and every Sunday when I'd go up there, I'd make up my mind to do it. But when I'd get there, I'd think—what if she'd say 'no'—or laugh at me—or, maybe get mad. So I never asked her. But I was always going to—sometime. Then when I heard what Penrose said, back there in the saloon, I hired out to him. I didn't figure to kill him—but I made up my mind to take him way back in the hills and then slip away and leave him there, and maybe be couldn't find his way back."

Black John listened in silence, and when the other ceased speaking, he nodded toward the packsack in the canoe. "And where were you hittin' for, now?"

"Why—I—I was pulling out. I've heard of the Dalton Trail and I figured if I could find it maybe I could get away. I've heard how you hang men on Halfaday for murder."

"We hang 'em for killin' men, son—not for killin' skunks."

"But — the police? You said Corporal Downey was at Penrose's shack? The law will call it murder."

"Yeah, the law might, at that."

A ray of hope gleamed in the young man's eyes. "If you don't believe it was a crime—killing a man like that—maybe you could tell me how to find the Dalton Trail. Maybe if I start now, I could get outside before Corporal Downey could catch me."

"How about Ella May?"

The other shook his head, slowly: "I—I guess Ella May will always be—just a dream—now."

Black John frowned. "I'll tell you about a trail—but not the Dalton Trail. It's a trail that will take you to a Siwash village up the White, an' back off the river. Father Cassatt's got a mission there. He's a fine man. When you get to Owl Crick, you stop in there an' pick up Ella May, an' take her on up with you. Father Cassatt will marry you. Then you two can come back an' work your claim here."

"But—Corporal Downey? The law—?"

"Leave Downey an' the law to me."

"But — Ella May! I—I've never even asked her to marry me. Maybe she'll think I'm a fool."

"She knows damn well you are, an' so do all the rest of us—for not askin' her a long time ago!"

"But—I'll have to tell her I shot Penrose, and——"

"Yeah—an' when you tell her what you know about him, she'll say it was the best shot you ever made! An' if she's got any doubts about what kind of a skunk he was, jest send her to me. Get goin' now. But first, you better let me have your pistol an' all the shells you've got for it. Don't leave

any thirty-two shells layin' around. An' if Downey shows up an' starts askin' questions—don't tell him a damn thing. Don't even admit you ever seen Penrose, or even heard tell of him. Keep mum. Don't tell him nothin' about nothin'. He can't convict you, even if he tries, if he can't find the gun, an' you don't shoot off your mouth. If he asks you if you own a thirty-two tell him 'no.' It'll be my gun when you hand it over to me. Get me the gun an' the shells, an' get goin'. I'm hittin' back to Cush's."

IV

DARKNESS had settled over the little valley of Halfaday when the big man stepped into the saloon to find Corporal Downey standing at the bar talking with Cush.

"Did you get your moose?" the officer asked.

"Hell, no! Never even seen one. Not even a track. Must all be in the high hills on account of the flies. I s'pose you're on the trail of some sinner—did you get your man?"

Downey nodded. "Yeah. I got him, all right. But he was dead when I got him."

"Dead, eh? Fill up. I'll buy one. What seemed to be his trouble?"

"His trouble," Downey answered, "was a bullet that caught him right square between the eyes. I got the bullet—a thirty-two. Do you know anyone who owns a thirty-two pistol or revolver?"

"Cripes sake, Downey—no one on Halfaday would own a damn pop-gun, like that!"

"How about you, Cush? Do you know of any thirty-two on the crick?"

Cush shook his head. "I ain't saw no thirty-two sence I was a kid."

"So someone saved the law a hangin', eh?" Black John asked. "Who was it got shot?"

"A guy with a string of aliases. Goes by the name of George W. Penrose, now. The law couldn't have hung him—though God knows he deserved it. We wanted him on a trafficking in women charge. We got a lot of dope on him from the American police—an' believe me, it ain't pretty readin'. He brought three girls in with him, an' turned 'em over to Cuter Malone. One of 'em's agreed to testify against him. So we'd have had a case, all right."

Black John nodded. "Yeah, you'd have had a case—if the girl didn't change her mind. An' if you'd got a conviction—which it's no cinch you would—Penrose might have got a couple of years in the pen, an' then be'n turned loose to go to work agin."

"That's right," Downey admitted. "He'd deserved to git a couple of hundred years, accordin' to that dope. It's about the worst I ever run acrost."

Black John grinned. "Well then, Downey—it would look like his present status is satisfactory, all around."

DOWNEY frowned. "I won't deny that it's a good thing he's dead. An' personally, I'm glad he is. But after all, John—murder's murder. The law don't take no account of the murdered man's past record. Accordin' to the law, it's as much a crime to murder Penrose, as it would be to murder Father Cassatt."

"Honest now, Downey—jest between us three—sometimes don't the law make you laugh?"

"There's plenty of times when I wished it gave us more latitude than what it does," the officer replied. "But with the law as it stands, I've got to try to locate the man that shot Penrose. I want to find out why he done it. I thought, of course, the motive was robbery—but cripes, he had a roll of big bills on him that would choke a horse. But there must have be'n some motive. A man don't commit a murder just for fun. I saw Pot Gutted John as I came up the crick, an' he told me he saw a young fellow by the name of Sam Evans goin' down the crick yesterday in a canoe with Penrose. Do you know this Evans?"

"Shore I know him. Good, steady goin' lad. Workin' a location over on a gulch just above the mouth of Halfaday. He was here yesterday. Come in the day before along with old Job Benson an' Ella May. He's nuts about Ella May. Figures on marryin' her, if he ever gets the guts to tell her about it. An' she wants it that way, too, accordin' to Job. Fine girl—Ella May."

Downey nodded. "You bet she is! I remember when she was a little kid, down on Forty Mile. She finished up her schoolin' last winter in Dawson. They say she's about the smartest student they ever had."

Black John nodded. "Job an' Ella May

pulled out yesterday mornin' for Owl Crick. Young Evans, he slept late, an' when he got up he come over here to get his supplies, an' Cush bein' busy, he told him to go in the storeroom an' dig the stuff out. Whilst he was in there, Penrose come in. We'd had a stud game the night before, an' Ella May looked on fer a few minutes, an' Penrose got to kiddin' with her. Then after supper, he saw her walkin' across the clearin', so he dropped out of the game an' went out, an' they set on that log out there on the edge of the bank, an' when it come dark, Ella May went inside an' Penrose got back in the game.

"Like I said, he come in here yesterday mornin' whilst Evans was in the storeroom, an' figurin', I s'pose that me an' Cush didn't give a damn what a man done, he started in to tell us how he was goin' to go up to Owl Crick, an' get old Job drunk, an' slip Ella May down to Dawson—claimed Cuter would have to pay through the nose fer her. Of course, he'd never got away with it. But he'd have tried. He wanted to know where he could get a guide to take him to Owl Crick.

"Standin' right here, I could see a pair of eyes there at the peek-hole, an' mistrustin' they might be Sam's, an' knowin' he was listenin' to what Penrose was sayin', I told Penrose I knew a young fellow that could guide him to Owl Crick, an' I hollered to Sam, an' he come out, an' took the job. Then a little while later, they pulled out." Corporal Downey remained silent for several moments, while Black John refilled his glass. He glanced at the Corporal. "Do you still want to call it a murder?" he asked.

Downey shook his head. "I don't want to, John. You know that. But it ain't what I want that counts. It's what the law says. The law would have dealt with Penrose."

"He's be'n dealt with," Black John said dryly. "An' it ain't no misdeal, like the law would have made, either."

"I'll admit he got what was comin' to him," Downey replied. "But jest the same I've got to go over to that gulch an' see what I can find. I've got a moon. I'll drop down to Olson's old shack an' hole up there tonight. Then in the mornin' I'll bury Penrose, an' go on over to Evans'."

Cush and Black John accompanied the officer to the landing and stood on the bank as he shoved his canoe into the water. As he was about to step into it, he turned and faced the two. "Of course," he said, "I'll have to have evidence. If I can't find a thirty-two gun around his place, an' if he should refuse to talk—I wouldn't even arrest him, because I know I'd never get a conviction—especially if you boys was to go on the stand an' tell the jury what you've jest told me."

Black John grinned. "Every once in a while the law does work out some sort of justice, don't it, Downey? Even if it is a sort of left-handed justice. Well, so long. Good luck to you!"

As the officer disappeared around a bend a few minutes later old Cush glanced into the big man's face. "Some damn fool jury might convict him, no matter what we told 'em," he said. "I shore hope to hell he don't find that gun."

Black John grinned, drew the thirty-two pistol from his pocket and tossed it into the creek. "He ain't apt to," he said. "Come on—I'll shake you for a drink."

The Open Road

By FRANK BONE

NO DESIRE of mine to wealth and riches hold,
Nor to travel in a lordly coach of gold;
Just to wander on, to love and laugh and sing,
Rather just to be a gypsy than a king.

The First Law of Elephant Hunting—to Leave Mad Bulls Alone

ROGUE BULL

By DON CAMERON SHAFER

THE BLACK runner wore but a dirty loincloth,

His spindly legs and splayed feet were gray with dust of the dry veldt.

He carried aloft in his right fist, that was like a harpy eagle's claw, a paper message tied in a cleft stick, lest in his simplicity he lay it down and forget it, or cast it aside as too small and insignificant to be of any value, or the African winds blow it away. He trotted into the trampled yard before a large thatched bungalow shouting his coming.

"*Bwana! Bwana!*" the one word in *Swahili* he knew.

A squat, long-armed, very black native, in a worn skin mantle, carrying a short stabbing spear, came out of the shadow to intercept him.

"Do the jackals call by day, Black Runner," he growled, in the *N'Ganzie* tongue,

"that you must waken the master with your cries at his hour of rest?"

"I carry this for thy master, Ape Face," waving the stick, " and it must be important."

"Give it to me, rear-end-of-a-dog, *Bwana Tawana* sleeps. And keep distance between us. I am astounded that one who smells so badly still lives."

"It is for his hand alone, Crooked One, from the Resident Commissioner."

"Then it also smells. Wherefore did he not send the *Askaris,* as usual?"

"The *Askaris* (native police) will come all in good time, Loin Meat, but that is not my concern—call thy ivory-stealing master."

"You will sit down, if you know which end is your face, and wait until *Bwana Tawana* wakens, and use thy stick to keep off the vultures."

Now the *N'Ganzie,* an agrarian people, had no love for the *Koyomo* who they deemed shiftless and lazy hunters, and their angry voices were sufficient to waken the master.

The dark shadow of the open bungalow doorway framed a tall man in white.

"Kuko what is this all about?" he demanded in *Swahili,* the *lingua franca* of all that part of Africa.

The *N'Ganzie* messenger ran forward and thrust the message stick into Grant Rickard's hand and stepped back to await a possible answer.

The white man was young and blonde. Blue-gray eyes scanned the official message. An American who had come to Africa several years before with a party of big-game hunters and, alone in the world, liked it so well he stayed on to hunt, to guide hunting parties on long *safaris* into the interior and to hunt ivory in districts not too closely protected.

"Have this runner fed and rested," he ordered in *Swahili,* the only language they had in common. "Tell him there is no chit to take back. Order my horse saddled and before the door in an hour."

"Then we do not go to hunt *Tembo* as we planned."

"We hunt *Tembo,* but not in the forest of the Little People. There is a bull trampling down the maize fields of the *N'Ganzie*—"

"It would be well if all the *N'Ganzie* starved!"

"The government asks me to kill this bull."

"There is no understanding Government. Those people all have noises in their heads. One day they forbid us to hunt *Tembo* and now they have a bull to be killed."

"Because it is a mad bull."

"*Bwana!* we go to our death. You know it is the first law of elephant hunting to leave mad bulls alone. They are bedeviled and bewitched."

II

MARK of the far northern desert was on the paint mare Grant Rickard rode into the compound before Government House. Her small feet touched the sand daintily. Thin legs danced her along, now that there was an appreciative audience. Beside her, clinging to a stirrup strap was the faithful-unto-death Kuko carrying the inevitable rifle. Drivers of two-wheeled carts, hauled by white hump-backed cattle, cracked their rhino whips and shouted to clear a way. A *Saise,* black horse boy, ran out of the shadows to care for the mare. A handful of *Askaris* wearing little else but shorts and their shoulder cartridge belts, came out of their barracks with guns to see what all the noise and confusion was about.

"*Bwana,* there may be some trick to this," warned Kulo. "We live outside the white man's law."

"There will be some good ivory in it," smiled Rickard, as he dismounted, "or the Commissioner can kill his own bull."

Monsieur l'Commissionaire, a conceited and arrogant little Belgian, wore a clipped black beard, rather sparse along fat cheeks, faintly rouged, which he foolishly believed made him appear more manly, despite so many effecinate ways.

Among white men he suffered from an inferiority complex but with the blacks he over-emphasized his petty authority in an attempt to make himself big in their dark and sullen eyes.

Just now he was all smiles and affability.

"Ah, so you arrive," in a torrent of shrill words. "M. Rickard, the American big-game hunter, mighty slayer of elephants—you have come—welcome stranger—"

"So recently you were calling me other names, not so nice, accusing me of being a poacher of elephants."

"Ah, to be sure, and not without some truth, perhaps."

"Perhaps," grinned Rickard, "but you never caught me with any ivory."

"Ah, *Monsieur* you are clever, and most elusive. The blacks credit you with powerful magic. Perhaps all those bulls you killed were without ivory. But we must not quarrel about that at this late day. It is, as you say, water under a bridge, ivory across the sea. I have sent for you because there is a rogue elephant that must be killed."

"Why don't you kill him?" with malice aforethought.

"*Non, non,* M. Rickard, I am not a hunter of elephants."

"A hunter of men," significantly.

"When they break the law. There is a time to leave the bulls alone and a time when they must be killed. You, M. Rickard, the big-game hunter, bravest of all, shall have the pleasure and honor of killing this mad bull."

"It will not be a pleasure," in all truth, "it will be a dangerous risk."

"Not for you, *Monsieur,* not for the best shot in Africa. Not for the greatest elephant hunter in the land. This bull must die. The *N'Ganzie* people are in revolt. If this mad beast destroys their maize crop the government must support them. You know what that means."

"It means you will get your ears slapped back."

"I will lose my position," visibly alarmed. "Sit down, M. Rickard. Here is cognac, wine, cigarettes, let us be friends again."

"We never have been friends."

"Just for today then. After that bull is killed we may continue as friendly enemies."

THE COMMISSIONER described the mad bull that was trampling the maize fields and knocking over *N'Ganzie* huts. Rickard knew them for a peaceful farming people. Not like the *Marobi* who live by their herds, drinking the blood of cows instead of milk, but ever ready with their spears to defend their animals against *Simba,* the lion. These timid *N'Ganzie* people lacked both the courage and the weapons to slay an elephant.

This rogue bull, explained the Commissioner, like so many of his kind seemed even more intelligent and crafty with the musth upon him, endowed with terrible ferocity and an urge for destruction such as no sane elephant ever knows. The mad bull was never seen by day, hiding safely away in the jungle, but at night, especially very dark nights, he came out of hiding, always alone, to feed in the maize fields and to trample down and destroy what he did not consume.

Not content with this he ran amock through the native villages, knocking over the grass and mud huts, killing all in his path. He was described by the natives, no doubt magnified by their fears, as standing the length of a man's arm higher in the shoulders than any bull ever seen before by man. His track was as large as the bottom of an oil barrel and the path he mowed down through the standing maize was wide as an army truck.

"And such ivory! *Monsieur,* if half of what the blacks say is true that bull carries a fortune in ivory. And when you have shot him, M. Rickard, as you certainly will, one of those mighty tusks is yours."

"Both will be mine."

"*Non, non, Monsieur,* one must go to the government."

"Both," firmly.

"You are a hard man, M. Rickard."

"But an honest one," significantly, well knowing where the other tusk would go.

"Except where the game laws are concerned."

"There are laws of the hunt. I obey them. Wild game belongs to the man who can get it."

"That is what all you hunters preach but it is not true. My government—"

"Took the land from the natives, ran up a flag and claimed it, when all this was wild country."

"We will not argue about that now. You will hunt the mad bull?"

"For the ivory."

"One."

"Both."

"No—no—"

"Good-bye."

The Commissioner's shrill voice overtook him at the door.

"Name of a name! It is two then. I have sentenced that bull to death. He must die or I lose my head."

III

"*HU-YAH! HU-YAH!*" The Moslem headman, in a once white robe, a tasseled cap on his bald head, cracked his hypo whip close to straining black flanks, but was careful not to touch one.

"*Hu-yaaaaah!*"

A swarm of blacks heaved at the heavily loaded little truck, to start it—the engine coughed—sputtered—caught, roared to sudden power, enveloping all in a cloud of smoke and dust.

"You ride with death," he muttered as the top heavy, overburdened car lurched out of the yard. "Allah will receive you!"

Kuko, the gunbearer, clung to his seat beside Rickard. His beloved rifles were in an improvised rack behind him. Atop the load, like tame monkeys, the black cook and Rickard's camp boy held precariously to the tie ropes.

The old truck, with lion claw marks on the fenders, was all of the *safari* to hunt the

rogue bull of the *N'Ganzie* villages. It did away with the need of porters, whenever a few liters of gas were available. He took with him only such help and supplies as was necessary.

"*Bwana Tawana,*" when Kuko could be heard above the noise of the old engine. "A great wizard of the *Marobi* told me that a man could kill only so many big bulls."

"How many?" in *Swahili,* their common language.

"The One-Too-Many will kill him."

"There is danger in every hunt."

"When death comes I will be standing there with your other gun ready in my hands," he sighed, "but I do not go willingly to my grave."

"You croak like a sick raven."

"This *Tembo* is mad."

"When did we ever leave the track of a bull carrying good ivory for any reason?"

"It is bad country to hunt in."

"What manner of country?"

"It is both wet and dry, plain and forest, park and jungle—"

"It is Africa."

"And those unfortunate *N'Ganzie* have little magic to protect them."

The truck knew no road, bouncing and jolting over the dry plain. Herds of zebra raced with it for miles, kicking and baring long yellow teeth. Oryx, running with the zebras, threatened with their sharp horns. Wildebeest ran before it. And once a family of lions, a big black-maned male, a tawny female and three well grown cubs, passed sedately, hardly looking, their full bellies almost dragging on the ground, homeward to a favorite shady tree for the daily siesta. Rickard was an ivory hunter, he did not bother lions, shooting only small game for the table.

On this high plateau the weather differed but little from the country Rickard knew back at home, in New Mexico, and he dressed no different than as though he were going out to hunt grizzlies, wearing his usual hunting clothing and a wide-brimmed gray felt hat.

By day they traveled over the high veldt avoiding warthog pits, negotiating dongas and dry watercourses, through the dust fog of stampeding game. At night they pitched a small camp in some likely place, where there was a little water, even though fouled by game.

The *N'Ganzie* villages of mud-daubed wattle and straw were scattered over the wide level overflow lands of a small river, now shrunken with drought to a few muddy pools, surrounded by their individual *shambas* of maize and yams.

A simple, inoffensive and pacific people, living entirely on vegetables. For centuries

of time these agrarians had fought back the jungle, now a green wall halted at the edge of tillable land, and hundreds of acres were under laborious hand cultivation. Because they kept no fat-tailed sheep, or hump-backed cattle, they were not molested by lions. Long thorn fences diverted the herds of wild game and watchers on tall pole platforms frightened away animals that might stray inside the barriers. Unarmed, they were helpless against the nightly forays of a mad elephant and the loss of their crops meant starvation unless Government supplied food, at exorbitant cost in road work.

The *N'Ganzie* people ran out to meet them—men, women and children. They may have had little magic but somehow they knew of his coming, that the white man had arrived to destroy the mad bull ruining their maize fields and razing their villages. They ran out of their beehive grass and mud huts to intercept the truck, to shout their joyous welcome at hope of deliverance. An hysterical people with no words in English and few in *Swahili,* but Kuko, with the gift of tongues from hunting among so many wild tribes, talked to them.

"Their sorcerer assures me that this *Tembo* is not a bull but a demon," he reported to Rickard.

"When demons make tracks like those," pointing to the muddy edge of a nearby springhole, "I also hunt them."

Kuko stood a long time studying the huge elephant tracks in the soft mud.

"Truly that is the mark of a bull, only they do not grow that large."

"This one did."

"You have great power and magic, *Bwana,* but surely you do not plan to hunt this monster at night."

"No."

"They tell me that no one ever sees the spirit bull by day."

"We will," Rickard promised.

He ordered camp made at the far edge of the villages, where he thought they would be safe.

IV

THAT night the *N'Ganzie* danced.

Around leaping fires, to the throb of hand drums, they danced naked, head plumes nodding on tall headdresses. They chanted as they danced, singing the death of the rogue.

"No more will our corn be trampled
Our villages destroyed
Our people killed.
The Mad Beast is about to die.
Die.
Die in the morning.
For the white hunter has come.
He has great magic
The beast dies."

Louder and quicker the drums, faster the stamping black feet, until the dance became an hysterical shrill, wild shouting in hypnotic frenzy.

Rickard hurried away from it into the night, out into the shadows, Kuko at heel. The moon had slipped down behind the high hills. Only a few of the larger stars were out. Behind them as they walked down a beaten pathway between the cultivated fields the noisy chorus shrilled away to mingle with the soft voices of night insects. For a long time Rickard stood there, listening, thinking, planning this hunt of the morrow. Then, afar, came a high trumpeting, the voice of the mad bull.

"Tembo," said he.

"No, *Bwana,* that is not the voice of *Tembo,"* said Kuko. "There is an ancient song of my people that speaks of the Beasts-That-Were, much larger than *Tembo* and much more dangerous."

Listening, they could hear the crash of tumbling huts in a distant village, screams of frightened children, the rush and pound of a huge beast running through dry, standing corn.

"In that old song of my people," continued Kuko, "it tells of the grandfather of *Tembo,* much larger and more ferocious—this must be his spirit returned to the flesh."

"Tomorrow," promised Rickard, "we will hunt him, regardless of how big or how mad he may be."

"Let us go home," pleaded Kuko. "You note that there are no flying foxes here, they will not fly in the same night air with witches."

"It is because there is no fruit here."

"It is because this country is accursed and bewitched and bedeviled."

"The white man's magic has conquered all witches and cast out all devils."

"Only in your world—let us go back!"

V

RICKARD had hunted ivory too long to start looking for a rogue bull without careful planning and preparation. Next morning he moved their camp near the ruins of a little village the elephant had destroyed. The bull's tracks were the largest Rickard ever had seen. Mark of his tusks in an overturned and wrecked hut indicated a weight of ivory beyond anything he ever had imagined. Surely this was the grandfather of all bull elephants and perhaps a throwback to mastodon ancestors. He found the countryside, beyond the cultivated *shambas* of the *N'Ganzies,* typical of central Africa. There were dense jungles along the watercourses in the near distance, steep, rolling hills, mostly heavily forested and, occasionally, areas of scrub thorn, growing in dense patches, interspaced with open grasslands.

While he was making this inspection of the ground where he must hunt the dangerous bull, a party of *Dorobo* hunters, wild men in every sense of the word, came along. Almost naked, armed with bright spears, men who ate nothing but meat and blood. Through Kuko, Rickard questioned them about the country thereabouts.

"Asked if they had seen a bull elephant."

"They say no."

"Didn't they see tracks or spoor?"

"Not elephant tracks—spirit tracks—there is no spoor."

"Will they help us, guide us—I will pay well?"

"Not for any price—it is a thing bewitched. Three men followed that track, even after the sorcerers advised against it—they never came back."

VI

IN THE midst of a noisy thundershower, Rickard wakened to the roar and rumble, to the beat of hard rain on the canvas over his head, to Kuko's violent shaking.

"Tembo, Bwana, Tembo!"

Thunder rolled away in the distance permitting Rickard to hear, nearby, the high-pitched trumpeting of a bull elephant. Above the drum of rain came the pounding of a charging elephant's heavy feet. He had heard this ominous sound too many times to be deceived, or to be unmindful of danger, tumbling from his cot, fighting off the clinging blankets, scrambling from the tent. In a flash of light he saw, like a fearsome apparition, a huge dark hulk bearing swiftly down upon them, as he stumbled over a tent rope and rolled out of the way. Amid the crash and rattle of cooking tins, the crunch and splintering of food boxes, the ripping of canvas, the scream of frightened camp boys, the tent disappearing in the darkness, dragging from one of the big tusks.

Rickard managed a match in cupped hands until Kuko found a lantern, lighting it. He shouted back the camps boys unhurt. Surveying the damage, they found sticks and broken tent poles to lift one end of a tarpaulin covering the little truck for a temporary shelter against the rain.

"It was a warning, *Bwana,*" said Kuko,

teeth chattering with cold and wet. "Tomorrow we will go home."

"Tomorrow we will take the track of that bull," said Rickard examining a broken rifle. "And never leave it until we have killed him."

"Or he has killed us!"

The hunt began with dawn.

Rickard followed the bull's deep tracks in the wet fields for miles through the cornfields, Kuko following reluctantly with the rifles, until the trail ended in a well-beaten path in the jungle. He could see that hunting a mad bull in such cover would require all the skill and knowledge both he and Kuko had acquired in years of ivory hunting. In common with many other hunters, Rickard considered elephants the most dangerous, the most likely to charge, wounded or not, of all African big game, and especially vicious when in musth. The lions Rickard had killed were dangerous, but they

were all killed in the open, with the advantage in favor of the armed hunter. The few rhino and buffalo he had been forced to shoot to save his truck, and his men, were bad enough but he knew from actual experience that a bull elephant, king of all living beasts, is the most difficult to stop in a charge, because only a brain shot is fatal and invariably of later years, they must be hunted in the thickest cover. Harried for so many years by ivory hunters, African elephants have become exceedingly cunning, feeding only at night, retiring to the heaviest cover by day and if surprised are quick to attack.

Here in the lowlands they found the forest jungle quite impassable, except along well-beaten game trails. The spindly trees were not more than forty feet high, interlaced with innumerable clinging vines and creepers. The forest beneath was a dense growth of giant mosses, ferns and plants. Through it all ran innumerable game trails and pathways of all sizes, from the narrow roads of small rodents to the wide paths of buffalo and the still wider trails the rogue bull had beaten out during weeks of using that locality. These big-game trails were dark and gloomy, the forest meeting overhead, eerie and depressing.

"I do not like this place," protested Kuko, "All the *N'Ganzie* witches must live here."

A noisesome gray bat, disturbed by Rickard, fluttered out of a leafy branch into Kuko's face.

"Bwana," brushing it aside in horror, "take my elephant charm."

He stripped from his corded neck a small, greasy leather bag, neatly stitched, suspended from a thong. "With this and the white man's magic you may live to kill the bull, but I stand here marked with death."

"Kuko," scolding, "how many times have I told you that all such signs are but silly imaginings."

"Many, many times, *Bwana,* but never to convince me. I know that bull will catch me. Unless you take the charm I will not go on."

Rickard took it, not because he had any faith in charms, but because he knew that it was useless to argue, and Kuko's skill and talents were necessary if the hunt was to be successful. Despite his years the primitive black had the sight, hearing and keen sense of smell of an animal. He had hunted elephants all his mature life, with spears and pitfalls long before white hunters came with their magic guns.

Somewhere out there in the jungle the rogue bull was resting, after a night of destruction.

Big, wing-like ears were, in reality, powerful listening devices, capable of picking up faint sounds at incredible distances, and the long trunk was one of the most delicate and sensitive scent organs in the animal world. Not only must they proceed with the greatest caution, without making any noticeable noise, but the hunt must be always up-wind. Every little way they stopped to listen. Rickard lit matches and held up long strands of spiderweb to determine which way the ground currents were drifting. Every suspicious sound must be investigated. Once the distant *swish-swish* of tree branches, which might have been caused by *Tembo,* proved to be the hurried flight of a family of long-tailed, black-and-white monkeys. For more than an hour they worked their way toward a place where the tops of small trees were swaying, only to find a herd of buffalo scratching their insect-ridden hides on the rough bark, and had to make a long detour so as not to disturb them.

Rickard reasoned that the big bull, if unmolested, would remain inactive until dark, well hidden in the thickest growth and very quiet. Nevertheless, if they chanced to come anywhere near, his presence would be betrayed by the low rumbling and grumbling of digestive organs after a night of heavy feeding. If they could hear this unmistakable sound there was a chance that a bold hunter might work his way near enough for a successful shot.

"Listen, *Bwana,"* cautioned Kuko.

Rickard heard nothing but the hum of small insects about his ears, the wing-scraping of cicadas in the trees. Kuko touched him on the arm and whispered hoarsely.

"Bwana, we are not hunting, *Tembo*—he is hunting us!"

VII

LISTENING close, they could hear the stealthy approach of a heavy beast coming slowly up the crooked trail behind them.

At first Rickard thought it might be a wandering buffalo, dangerous enough by itself at close quarters in any jungle. Then he distinctly heard the deep, indrawn breath of an elephant. Instinctively he knew that the bull's trunk was searching the damp air for their body scent, as a bird dog locates a covey of quail hiding in the stubble. The charge would come the instant the bull was satisfied that he knew exactly where they were. Rickard had hunted big game too long to take any useless chances. He had no intention of trying to kill a mad elephant in that thick cover, the odds being fifty to one that he could not stop the bull.

They ran, quietly as possible, speeding away down a hard-beaten pathway, turning quickly to the right at the first cross trail, and then to the left, to take advantage of the air currents. They were too deep in the forest to make a race of it. Rickard hoped to maneuver and dodge, to keep out of scent and hearing, until they could work their way back to the *N'Ganzie* fields or, failing in this, find some partially open space where he dared stop with a fair chance of a successful shot. They were forced to keep to the beaten game paths but the big bull could go where he pleased, crashing through the jungle with no more discomfiture than a man walking through a hay field. The rogue could not see them, but every time the scent was hot he came charging through like an army truck out of control. Despite their bulk, elephants can move with astonishing speed and endurance. For several minutes this wild race continued, with many close calls when the charging bull missed them by only a few yards.

Swerving quickly down a cross trail, after a very narrow escape, the hunters were forced to turn aside again to get out of the way of the small buffalo herd they had seen earlier in the day, alarmed at the noise of pursuit and stampeding through the brush. This maneuver perforce brought them back nearer the rogue bull. He burst out of the green wall like a locomotive and seized the luckless Kuko in his long trunk. His struggling body, high in the air, blocked any possible chance of a successful shot. Rickard realized in that fatal moment that if he didn't shoot at once Kuko would be killed. Whirling about he fired two quick shots at the bull's exposed knees. The high-power bullets did not shatter the leg bones but the shock and pain stopped the bull. He tossed Kuko aside, trumpeting wildly, and as his big head lowered, Rickard shot him in the left eye, the ball piercing the brain. He came down in a terrific somersault, end over end, stopping almost at Rickard's feet. Kuko came limping out of the tangled green, a dense mass of vegetation having broken his fall.

"We have killed many bulls," said he, surveying the mountain of flesh and the heavy tusks, "but never one as big as this and with such ivory."

"Nearly two hundred pounds the pair," said Rickard, although pounds meant nothing to the black. "I will stay with the dead bull. You run back and notify the *N'Ganzie* that for once they will have meat. Bring axes to cut out the tusks."

"Bwana," seriously. "I thought for a moment that the elephant charm was not going to work."

"It worked," grinned Rickard, handing it back. "I thought myself that this was the One-Too-Many Bull."

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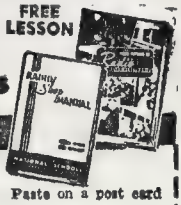

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WRONG SWITCH

By NORRELL GREGORY

THREE hours off schedule, a mile of assorted cars on her tail and steam spouting from a cracked forward cylinder head, the mighty Mallet wallowed into the snow-blanketed yards and died with a final, gigantic sigh. Wes Fargo climbed down from the towering cab and cut straight for the timekeeper's office.

The young engineer looked tired and finely drawn. There were lines of strain in his face and no spring in his long legs. He expected a call on the carpet, and he got it before he finished signing the engineman's register.

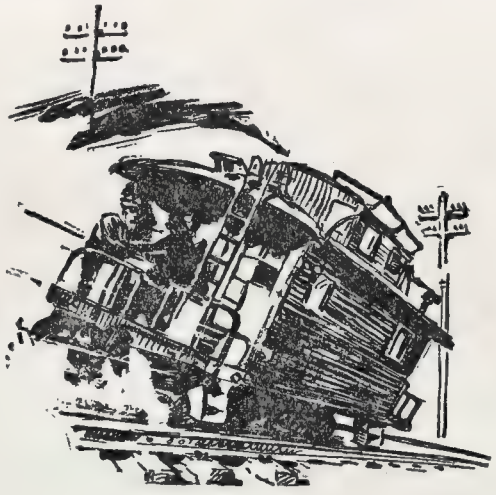
"Baggerly," the timekeeper tried to keep his voice casual, "wants to see you in his office."

Wes merely nodded. Crossed the multi-tracked, congested yards where four switch crews battled with the influx from three over-taxed divisions, climbed the steep stairs to the divisional offices on the second floor of the station building.

When he entered the outer office of Divisional Superintendent Dan Baggerly, he could hear Baggerly's robust and searching voice emanating from the inner office. Chief Clerk Wycoff motioned for him to wait and Wes discovered that Baggerly was engaged in taking the hide off the Buffalo trainmaster, on the phone.

". . . no, George," Baggerly was saying, "I know exactly what you're trying to do. It's as plain as a wart on a dog's nose," only Baggerly referred to that part of a dog's anatomy almost as far removed from his nose as it could be —"and"—a fist smashed a desk top—"you're not going to get away with it! We're NOT going to do Buffalo's switching in these yards—get that? Do your own switching up there or you'll find it tossed back into your lap a lot faster than it was tossed into ours. G'by!"

Wycoff's pursy mouth struggled with a grin, and Wes, having never seen an honest grin on his face, completed it for him. His own grin, however, faded quickly when he stood before the wide expanse of the desk top, facing this massive-jowled railroad executive.



Short and Not at All Sweet—Back to Mauling a Yard Goat!

Superintendent Baggerly was not a fat man, but he was wide and deep and his jaw was as tough as any four-star general's. Now, beside his immaculate cleanliness, Wes felt about as disreputable as a hog in a wallow.

"Well," Baggerly's voice was quite amiable—he always was just before dropping the ax—"you get better, Wes! First you fail to make your schedule. Now you've started to cripple engines! Don't tell me you learned all these bad habits in the army!"

"All I can say is that I over-ran a siding switch and cracked a cylinder head."

Baggerly purred, "And just *why* did you over-run the switch? Wasn't there room on the siding for your train?"

Wes knew that Baggerly knew exactly how long his train was, and, to an inch or two, the length of every siding on the division. Nor did he like being treated like a small boy.

"Maybe," he said indifferently, "I haven't got the old touch back yet."

"Now *that,*" said Baggerly, "is strictly original! Usually it's a stuck throttle, isn't it?"

Wes said nothing and Baggerly got down to business. He knew perfectly well that Wes was holding out on him, and he meant to get to the bottom of things.

"It don't stand to reason that as good an engineer as you *were* could go so completely haywire without cause," he said toughly. "Are you feuding with your conductor? Is he falling down on his end? Out with it! A railroad cannot be run on sentiment."

Wes replied, "I'll let Ed Cullivan add whatever seems to be lacking."

Baggerly surveyed him with a sort of grim impatience. "I hate to do this to you, Wes, but I'm pulling you off your regular run. Of course, if you feel aggrieved, you can appeal to the Brotherhood, but I don't think you will. Maybe you can recover that lost touch in the *yards*. You'll be called for the first trick in the morning."

Short and not at all sweet. Wes would have preferred a suspension to the hellhole of the yards. Back to mauling a yard goat!

At the head of the stairs he met Ed Cullivan, his conductor. Cullivan's darkly handsome face was set and a brooding suspicion showed in his dark eyes. Just under thirty—three years older than Wes, he seemed to have found his return to civilian life not at all to his liking.

"I suppose," he said sourly, "you've alibied Baggerly blind."

"No," Wes replied, "I thought I'd leave that for you. But"—his voice sharpened—"the next time you let me over-run a switch without signaling that the back end is in the clear, I won't feel so charitable."

Cullivan retorted, "Nobody's asking charity from you. Just keep your nose clean and you'll do well, my boy."

"I'll do that," replied Wes.

As he went down the stairs he reflected that the army had its good points. There was none of this underhand sniping with your buddies. As an ex-buddy, he found it hard to believe that Ed Cullivan's failure to pass signals had NOT been an accident.

AS HE was passing the company parking lot, a girl's arched foot, followed by a considerable expanse of a shapely leg, thrust open a car door and held it open.

"Wesley, come here a moment, please."

Jessie Kent moved over and as he slid into the seat beside her, Wes was more conscious than ever of his disreputable engine garb. She was so clean and fresh and fragrant—prettier even at twenty-one than she had been when he entered the army. He had expected to find her married to Ed Cullivan when he came back, but she wasn't.

"What," her voice was just a shade cautious, "made you so late on your run?"

"Cracked a cylinder head."

She looked at him askance, her glance just touching his serious face, and her eyes were very quiet and very blue. Her profile was perfect as she studied the radiator emblem.

"I knew something had gone wrong when Ed told me he had to see the Superintendent before going home."

By that he knew that she had been waiting to drive Ed home and was conscious of a vague resentment. "Ed," he found himself becoming cautious, "seems to be having some trouble getting back into the harness."

She gave him a quick glance and laughed.

"That," she said, "is exactly what Ed says about you." Then she added facetiously,

"You two are not developing the old head-and-tail feud, are you?"

Wes let that pass. "There's something I want to ask you, Jessie," he was feeling his way very carefully now. "About those letters."

"What letters?" her voice was entirely guileless and her eyes were on the radiator emblem again.

"Those letters you wrote me while I was overseas. Were they just part of the war effort—just so much baloney to keep up our morale?"

Again she laughed but her knuckles were suddenly white on the steering column. She said humorously, "You didn't take *them* seriously, did you, Wes?"

"I'm just asking."

She spoke with a very precise, almost stilted enunciation, "Naturally they were just part of the war effort—as you put it, just so much baloney."

As he reached for the door handle there was both humor and ruefulness in his face.

"I was afraid of that." He stepped out of the car, then before closing the door, spoke again. "As to the feud between me and Ed, if there ever was any, it's over. Tomorrow I start mauling a yard goat again."

She sat very still in the car seat and she did not take her eyes from the radiator emblem as he walked away.

Wes did some heavy thinking that night before sleep came. He could see now that he had made a mistake in ever coming back to work on this division. He should have asked for a transfer to another.

Nobody but an addle-pated fool would ever have tried to make anything of those letters Jessie had written him. She had probably written the same kind to every other soldier from the division. But, he reflected ruefully, she needn't have been so damned convincing about it!

On the other hand he knew that they had certainly served their purpose—they certainly had given him an incentive to want to get back home alive. A lot of the boys, with nothing much to come home to, had gotten pretty cynical about everything.

HE WAS called on the first yard trick next morning and when he got down to the yards he found snow hip-deep everywhere and still coming down with the viscosity of thick soup. In this rugged country, notorious for heavy snow, he knew what that meant in these congested yards—mean, even in good weather.

He found he had drawn Gandy Yates as fireman, and that was a break, because Gandy was easy to work with. A long, droll fellow, Gandy had been a fireman as far back as he could remember, and a good one. By his own admission, Gandy had long ago given up ever amounting to anything and had found that quite satisfactory. Nothing bothered Gandy. He was always joking about his fat wife or relating some ribald anecdote.

Now as they wallowed up toward the head of the yards to reach their engine, Gandy drawled, "Before we ever hit the hay again, Wes, we'll both be outlaws."

He referred both to the weather and the eight-hour rule that made railroad men ineligible for further service after two consecutive tricks. Sixteen hours did not look at all attractive to Wes in those notoriously mean yards, with the grand-daddy of snows sweeping down from the lake region.

"Who's our crew, Gandy?"

"Got a student brakeman for one. Heard the timekeeper say he'd had but one engine."

"Not good! Who packs the switch list?"

Gandy nudged him with a sly elbow. "Seems like I saw your tail-end man looking for engine three-thirteen. Ed looked like he'd swallowed a catfish without taking time to pare off his fins."

Wes received a nasty jolt. Three-thirteen was their engine, and Ed Cullivan in the yards was ten times worse than Ed Cullivan on the tail of a mile of freight cars. He was beginning to see the fine hand of Baggerly in this. Ed, evidently, hadn't been able to satisfy Baggerly either.

"What," Gandy's voice was obsequiously innocent, "are you and Ed feuding over?"

"Who says we're feuding?"

"It's all over the yards, and"—Gandy gave him both the grin and elbow again—"I bet I can name the prize."

"You can also," Wes replied coldly, "wag a dirty tongue."

"Nack, nack!" said Gandy. "Never scorn the honest concern of a friend. You may need it some time."

When they reached their engine, they found not only Ed Cullivan waiting, but the two brakemen as well. One was a student, a green hand, and the other an experienced man named Burns.

Cullivan had evidently been forewarned, for he did not even look at Wes. He seemed to be in an especially bad humor and was venting it on the hapless student.

As they climbed into the cab of the big switcher, Gandy winked at Wes. "Looks like it's going to be a lovely day," he said loud enough for Cullivan to hear. Cullivan's ears grew beet-red but he said nothing.

The conductor of a yard crew is the boss. He carries the switch list and he gives the orders. In this yard, especially at the head end where they started work, an engineer had to be doubly careful of every move he made, because everything kicked down a lead had to be boarded and braked down by the field man—in this case the hapless student.

To make matters worse, the entire yard sloped sharply to the south and there was the added danger of a cut of cars getting away in an open lead, spin through to the switch on the lower end, thence out into the high iron, where a ten-mile grade gave them plenty of room to run wild.

All road men hated these yards. Here there was no chance for a respite. It was dive down a lead, snatch out a cut, back to the head end and kick. The student, working the field, was kept continually on the jump and with Ed Cullivan's constant rawhiding tactics, he was soon in a high state of nervous tension. Once, when he let a heavy car get away and smash damagingly into an anchored string, Cullivan gave him an abusive cursing.

Gandy said, "I wouldn't take that from my grandmother."

Wes said nothing, but the pattern of the thing was taking an ominous shape. Sooner or later, he knew, he and Ed would clash openly.

By noon the snow had increased to such a depth over the entire division that orders came through for all freights to head into the yards and lay over. The management was taking no chance on the road getting plugged with a mile-long string of freight cars.

Then the real battle began. Mallet after Mallet, each with her mile-long string of cars wallowed into the yards and it was up to the switch crews to find places for them and keep leads open for trains yet to come in.

Engines were cut off and thrown on the roundhouse or coaling spurs. Cabooses were yanked to the head of the yards and kicked into the caboose lead. Many of the crummies were occupied by storm-bound crews, and had to be handled like eggs.

Gandy took it all in great good humor, firing the big switcher with effortless ease, and helping Wes keep an eye on the student who was continually in difficulty.

"Caboose row," drawled Gandy, "will roar tonight. There'll be more dead soldiers laying around by morning than we lost at Tarawa."

Yard lights came on by mid-afternoon, and shortly before the trick ended, a caller found the engine.

"Double over on the second trick," he announced and then ducked quickly down the gangway to avoid a lump of coal hurled at his head by Gandy.

"Only eight hours more, Wes," Gandy said cheerfully. "We'll be outlawed then, and they can't push us around."

"Eight hours more of this," replied Wes, "and I'll be a candidate for Section Eight."

"What's that?" Gandy was not familiar with army slang.

"The bug house," replied Wes succinctly.

WITH nobody in sight at the end of the trick, Wes said, "Throw the gate to the house track, Gandy, and we'll run down opposite the "Y" and grab a warm feed before we start the second trick."

"I'll do that," said Gandy.

Wes ran the engine down to a point opposite the "Y," and after blocking the wheels of the engine with a chain, both went over to the beanery for a feed. Both knew perfectly well that it was against rules to leave a live engine unattended, but both also knew that it was done under less extenuating circumstances.

The "Y" was full of railroaders, forced, like themselves to double over. A roundhouse man reported that Number Four, the upbound passenger, had bogged down some ten miles below town and that an engine had been dispatched to help her in.

When they returned to the engine there was company waiting to receive them. It was Ed Cullivan and he was in a poisonous frame of mind.

"You know," he told Wes caustically, "that you're not supposed to leave the yards without orders and you know the rule about leaving live engines unattended. I'll have to turn you in."

"Ed," said Wes, "I don't know what has come over you. And if I reported every rule infraction that you've been guilty of the past month or two, you'd be looking for a job on some other division."

Cullivan retorted, "It's not your fault I'm not! You've done everything—"

Wes said warningly, "Don't say it, Ed!"

Cullivan would have said that and more if Gandy hadn't interposed his long frame between the two.

"G'wan!" quoth Gandy, pushing Cullivan toward the gangway. "Get off this engine while you're still lucky! Get off or I'll push you off!"

Cullivan almost missed the top step, but he got off the engine and Wes, his mouth tight, cracked the throttle and ran back toward the head of the yards.

"Something," declared Gandy, "is eating Ed bad. He'll wind up by pulling some goshawful boner and Baggerly will swing the ax on him." Then on second sober thought Gandy added, "And maybe somebody else along with him."

At the head of the yards they picked up the two brakemen and dropped down into a lead for a caboose. Cullivan sent Burns to bleed the air from a long string of cars, then ordered Wes over into another lead to pick up another caboose.

"Why," said Gandy, "didn't he kick that first caboose while we were at the head end?"

"Don't ask me," replied Wes shortly. "I'm just pulling the throttle. Ed carries the switch list."

With the two cabooses on the pilot coupling, they moved back to the head of the yard. Cullivan left the student to throw the caboose lead switch, stepped on the footboard of the engine and signaled for Wes to move back for the kick.

Gandy said warningly, "Now watch yourself, Wes! That student has throwed the wrong switch for the caboose lead."

Wes replied, "How do you know we're supposed to kick these crummies into the caboose lead, Gandy?"

"There's where they belong. Kick 'em easy!"

Cullivan signaled for the kick, and Wes, his mouth suddenly grim, gave him all he asked for and more. The big switcher, with her massive cylinders and low drivers, was very fast on her feet. Answering the throttle, she rammed those two cabooses back so fast that Cullivan, gripping the coupling pin lever, was almost snatched from the ground.

But Cullivan held on to the lever, signaled a stop and when Wes shot on the brakes the switcher stopped as if she had rammed the roundhouse wall.

Like coupled projectiles the caboose shot away from the pilot, heeled into Number Four lead with a scream of flanges, and the student, waiting for them at the head of the caboose lead, made a wild lunge to board them, did get one hand on an iron and was thrown sprawling. Then down the lead they sped, rapidly picking up speed on the downgrade.

Gandy said profanely, "Dammit, I tried to tell you!"

The cabooses, traveling at high speed, struck a string of cars with a thunderous concussion that killed every other sound in that tumultuous yard. It was the same string of cars that the brakeman, Burns, had been sent to bleed, and Wes saw, under his headlight beam, the pieces of broken coupling fly into the air when they struck.

The first thunderous concussion was followed by a series of smaller, but more ominous, ones as the slack ran out of the bled cars—back, back, back! Then as the entire half-mile string began to move, Wes saw the entire, ominous pattern.

Gandy said bleakly, "If you don't nail them, that string will be on the main in a mighty short while."

"Didn't you see the pieces of the coupling fly when they hit? Gandy, I can't nail them from this end!"

"Then it's Katy-bar-the-door for Number Four! She'll be coming up that grade double-shotted, pouring on the coal. It'll be your old neck if you don't nail them, Wes!"

Wes threw the engine into reverse. "Be ready to unload and give me the gate to

the main," he said tersely. "We'll have a stab at it."

AGILE as a mountain goat, Gandy loped off at the switch, threw it, then swung back aboard as Wes sent the switcher charging into the main. He knew exactly what Wes was going to try to do.

"Don't try it!" he shouted. "You can't beat—"

The piercing scream of the whistle as she charged down the main line drowned Gandy's further utterance. She was built expressly for switching purposes, without front or rear trucks and she bucked badly when ran over twenty miles an hour. In fact there was a standing rule never to drive her over twenty-five, but she was doing at least sixty before she had traveled half the distance from the head of the yards.

As they shot out into the clear of the yard buildings, Gandy threw a look toward the lower switch which the runaway string would have to split to reach the main. He saw the switch readily enough and he saw something else—a towering box car on the end of the string just entering the switch points.

He bawled, "Shut her down — SHUT HER DOWN! They're already on the switch!"

From the right side of the cab Wes could see what Gandy could not—a great spreading illumination beating up through the snow from below a curve in the mainline, and he knew it was the headlight of Number Four coming into the curve. Knew too, that those runaway cars had to be stopped at all cost.

So instead of shutting down as Gandy so urgently requested, he gave the big switcher the full quadrant. Her shout rent the clouds and she lunged like an over-extended bronco. Gandy wrapped his long arms about his head in a protective gesture and then with a crash that could have been heard twenty miles, the engine went into the box car.

There was a stunning shock and the box car seemed to literally explode. A sickening reel from the engine, the scream of torn metal, then the splintering rip as the switcher left the rails and took to the cross-ties.

Slammed stunningly against the hot boiler head, Wes heard the tender break loose and smash off the grade. Heard the thunder on thunder, behind him, as derailed cars began piling up in a wild and crashing heap, forming at the same time, an effective block for those cars still on the rails and plowing into the barricade.

With closed throttle and gripping brakes the big switcher plowed on, staggering, off the rails but still on the grade. When she finally rolled to a stop her stack was canted dizzily over a twenty-foot embankment and Number Four's headlight was blazing angrily into the canted cab, her whistle tearing the night apart. Then the racketing exhaust from twin stacks died suddenly and Wes heard the harsh grind of brakes.

Gandy, his eyes incredulous, said owlishly, "Reckon I should get out a flag?"

Since Number Four had already come to a full stop, Wes had to grin at that.

"I think," he replied, "that it's time to unload, Gandy."

"I was of that opinion a long time ago!"

They climbed down from the precariously tilted cab, wallowed around the gigantic pile of derailed cars where yardmen were hastily collecting, and moved toward the station.

Gandy said, "Wes, it's going to take a tight story to satisfy Baggerly on this deal. We'd better get together on ours."

"The student threw the wrong switch, Gandy."

Gandy said dryly, "He threw the switch he was told to throw."

"Gandy, I'd hate to call you a liar!"

"Go ahead!" said Gandy cheerfully. "And maybe you will call me another one when I tell you Ed Cullivan has been gunning for you ever since you came back to work."

"Nuts!" said Wes, and left it at that.

SOBER reflection, however, forced him to the acknowledgement that Gandy had basis for his inferred accusation. Why, for example, did Ed Cullivan allow the student to throw the wrong switch. There were, he knew, two switches close together at the point, but even from the cab window both he and Gandy could see the wrong light was green. It was hard to think such ugly things about an old army buddy, so he closed his mind against them and resolved to tell, at the carpet call which was sure to come, only what he had to tell and no more.

He was notified next morning to appear

in Baggerly's office by ten o'clock and there he found exactly one railroad man there—Superintendent Baggerly himself.

Baggerly said grimly, "You get better and better! Now you've tried to wreck the yards." Then when Wes said nothing he added sharply, "Well, what have you to say for yourself?"

"Only that those cars got away from us and I took the only means I had of stopping them before they wrecked Number Four."

Baggerly nodded. "It was a gutty thing to do, but *why* did they get away?"

"If Ed Cullivan can't explain that, it's no use for me to try."

Baggerly suddenly shifted his attack, "Why didn't you tell me that you and Ed were feuding over a girl—I gave you plenty of chance."

Wes said stiffly, "In the first place it was a purely personal matter and in the second there wasn't any feud."

"No," Baggerly was getting tough, "it was *not* a purely personal matter. Anything that affects the movement of trains is never purely personal. And if there is no feud between you and Ed Cullivan why did he admit that there was?"

"It's strictly one-sided, then," replied Wes.

Baggerly nailed him with his eyes. "This," he stated "is not an attempt to pry into your personal affairs. But I want to know this—have you ever given Cullivan an excuse to be jealous of you? By that I mean simply, have you deliberately tried to beat him out of the girl he is supposed to marry?"

Wes stiffened, "Would it be considered a crime if I had?"

"This is not a criminal investigation—yet. It's an honest attempt to find whether there are extenuating circumstances that would warrant leniency in dealing with, to put it mildly, delinquent employees. If a girl has been playing you and Ed against each other, just for a diversion, I want to know it."

Wes said warningly, "I can tell you straight that nothing like that has happened."

"Then, why," Baggerly again nailed Wes with his eyes, "did Cullivan, when I put the pressure on him, admit that he had been trying to put you on the spot and excuse himself by saying he was crazy with jealousy. I don't want to have to blackmail any man, but on the face of things, Cullivan has it coming."

Wes said slowly, "I have never given Ed any excuse for that attitude, and I *know* the girl in question hasn't. But there is a possibility that Ed may have seen some letters she wrote me while we were overseas—we were buddies—and placed the wrong interpretation on them. They were meant as nothing more or less than morale builders—she told me so herself. Under the circumstances I think Ed deserves some consideration."

Baggerly nodded. "He has asked for transfer to another division and it is worth considering." Then after a pause he added, "You'll go back to your regular run tomorrow—if the line is open."

At the foot of the stairs Wes encountered Jessie Kent. It was, apparently, purely a chance meeting and he would have rather avoided the meeting. Jessie, however, seemed quite at ease, quite polite.

She asked facetiously, "How does it feel to be a hero?"

"Never having been one," he replied, "I couldn't say."

She dropped her bantering attitude. "Wes, do you know what Mr. Baggerly has decided to do with Ed?"

"I think he intends to transfer Ed to another division," he replied cautiously. Then after an awkward pause, "Jessie, I'm afraid I have a confession to make."

"A confession?" she showed surprise.

He nodded, "Ed was not entirely to blame for what happened in the yards last night. To be honest, I kicked those cars too hard."

"Why?" her interest narrowed.

"Because, to be perfectly honest, I was bitten by the same bug that seems to have been bothering Ed. Those letters," he smiled faintly, "were too much like the real thing."

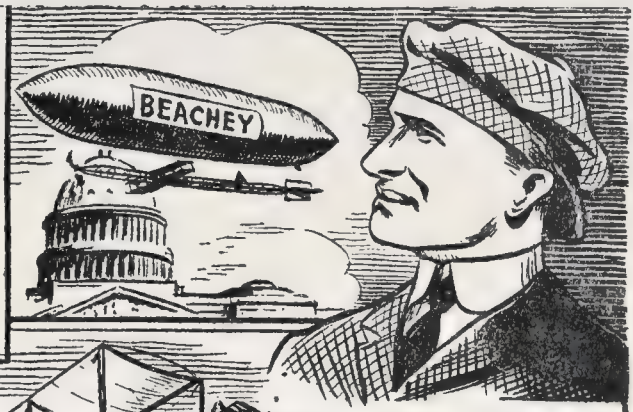
She made a small, odd sound, then turned quickly away from him as if to move on. For three pulse beats she stood thus, then she turned back.

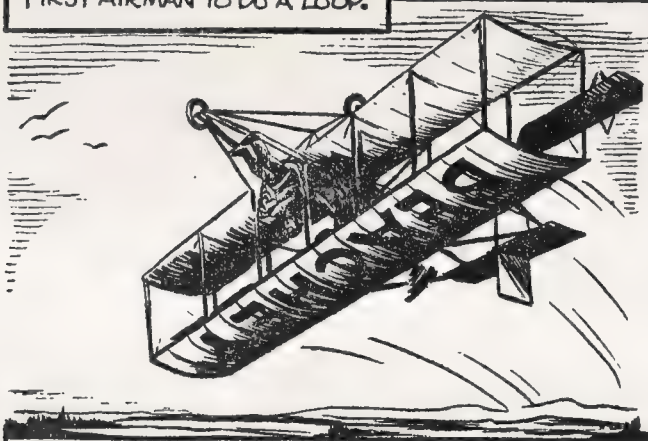
"Wes," her voice was very low, "I'm afraid I have a confession, too. I've fought against it, but I've got to tell you. Those letters—they weren't baloney—I—I meant every word of them."

FLYING TINTYPES

BY JIM RAY

LINCOLN BEACHEY WAS UNDOUBTEDLY AMERICA'S FIRST POPULAR AIR HERO. ALREADY FAMOUS AS A BALLOONIST AND DIRIGIBLE PILOT—HE MADE HIS FIRST BALLOON ASCENSION AT 13. HE LEARNED TO FLY WITH GLENN CURTISS IN 1909 AND IN A SHORT TIME EXCELLED AS A DARING PILOT. HE PIONEERED IN MANY DIFFICULT MANEUVERS, AND WAS THE FIRST AIRMAN TO DO A LOOP.



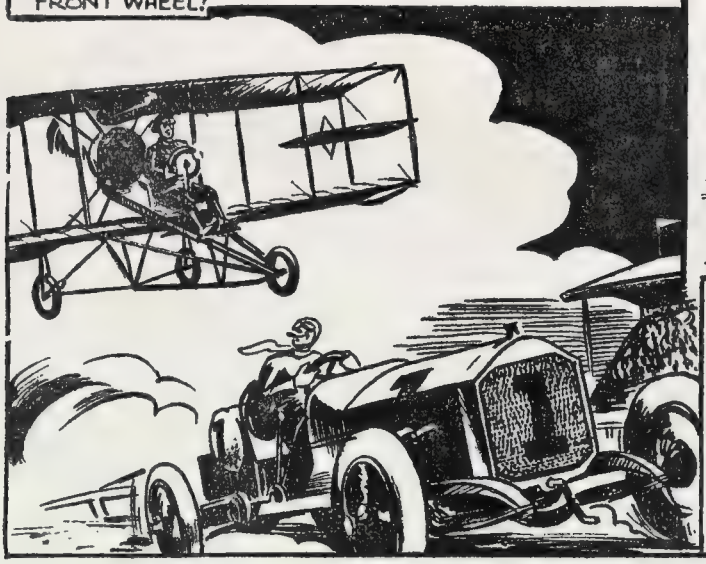


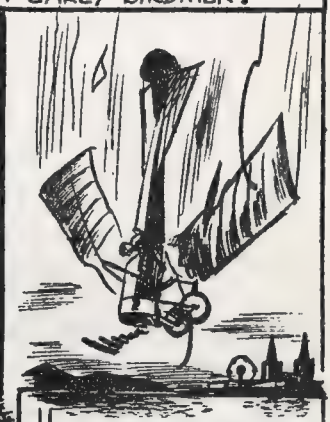
WHEN SKEPTICS DOUBTED THAT HE EVER LOOPED A PLANE, BEACHEY PAINTED HIS NAME ON THE TOP WING, TOOK OFF, AND PROVED IT!

HE THRILLED THE NATION WHEN HE FLEW OVER NIAGARA FALLS, DIPPED INTO THE GORGE, AND PASSED UNDER THE SUSPENSION BRIDGE.

BEACHEY'S GREATEST CONTRIBUTION TO AVIATION WAS HIS CONQUEST OF THE TAILSPIN, THE FATAL BUGABOO OF EARLY 'BIRDMEN'.

BEACHEY'S DELICATE SKILL IN HANDLING A PLANE WAS DEMONSTRATED IN PLANE VS. AUTOMOBILE RACES WITH BARNEY OLDFIELD. HE WOULD FLY OVER BARNEY AND TAP HIS HEAD WITH THE FRONT WHEEL!





HE EMERGED FROM RETIREMENT IN 1915 TO FLY IN THE PANAMA-PACIFIC FAIR, AND WAS KILLED IN A PLUNGE INTO SAN FRANCISCO BAY WHEN HIS NEW MONOPLANE COLLAPSED. HIS DEATH RAN CURRENT WAR NEWS OFF THE FRONT PAGES FOR TWO DAYS!

The Mistress of Massacre Flat

By ORLANDO RIGONI

CHAPTER I

BEYOND HIS JURISDICTION

LEE CONANT lifted his gaunt body on an elbow and sniffed the air suspiciously. At first he thought it was the sound of his own cayuse, tethered nearby, which had awakened him, but there could be no mistaking the sound of a herd of cattle on the move. The night was utterly black, but far below the hill on which stood the Metatakin ruins in which he had fixed his bed, the old familiar sound surged and ebbed like a far-off echo.

Conant's deep eyes puckered inquisitively. This could not be the herd he had trailed from the Hovenweep all the way across the painted desert. This herd, from the sound of it, was coming up from the southwest. Conant lay back upon his bed of juniper

Massacre Flat . . . Haunt of Bad Men and Ghost Wolves

branches. It would be useless to try and get a line on the herd in the dark. Cattle leave tracks, and tracks can be followed and he would much rather come upon the herd in daylight when he could see, beforehand, what he was up against.

Conant had a rule which he had learned from his father when very young, and that was to never put yourself at a disadvantage in order to hurry a job along. Take your time and be sure of everything before you act. At present there was too much at stake to be caught flatfooted and perhaps killed from ambush. There was a thousand head of cattle and there was the life of his brother, Paul, if Paul was still alive.

Lee Conant slept restlessly the rest of the night, and the first timid light of dawn found him alert and eager to take the trail. Recalling the sounds of the night before, a strange foreboding of danger disturbed him. He ate a cold breakfast because he did not care to risk the telltale banner of a smoke plume.

Before mounting his horse, he unpinned the deputy's badge from his gray flannel shirt and pinned it inside his right boot. It was a shining, new badge. He had prevailed upon Sheriff Carey of Hanover to deputize him before he had started on this grim trail, and the old sheriff had said:

"I reckon it won't do much good, Lee. There ain't much law in this 'four-corners' country. A crook can skip from Colorado into New Mexico, or from Arizoney into Utah afore any kind of law can catch up with him. But if you want a badge, it's yores. I reckon you understand that my territory don't reach south o' the Hovenweep Monument."

Now he was three hundred miles south of the Hovenweep and he knew he had no jurisdiction here, but he had a plan. It was a plan which required nerve and fast thinking. He mounted his big horse with an easy swing of his long leg, and headed down the hill from the Indian ruins.

Below him stretched the hot, snake-infested desert. It was an arid wilderness of cactus, blood-red sand and weird rocks. Not far to the north rose the brown walls of the Mesa Caballo on top of which was Massacre Flat. He had heard strange tales of Massacre Flat, but he had never believed them.

On the desert floor he picked up the trail of the cattle he had heard the night before and followed it to the river which flowed through a deep gorge at the foot of the Mesa Caballo. The herd had entered the water, but Conant, after fording the stream, was unable to find the trail emerging from the water. He examined the narrow shelf of rock between the gouged and eroded wall of the mesa and the river, but found no sign of cattle.

He rode down the river for five miles, but failed to find the trail, and, perplexed, he returned to where he had crossed. By that time it was getting late, and the low-hanging rays of the sun faintly etched the outline of a trail winding precariously up the side of the cliff.

Conant knew that no cattle could have gone up that trail which would be difficult even for a man on foot. Driving his horse ahead of him, he began the precarious ascent. It was grim, tedious work, and twilight faded into dusk before he was at the top.

REACHING the top, he found himself in a dense growth of pinon and juniper. The black sage was waist high and it was difficult to see much of anything. While he stood rigid, giving his horse time to get his wind, he was startled to hear a voice growl:

"You've come to the wrong place, stranger. We don't welcome visitors. I'll give you just five seconds to get on your horse and start back down the trail. One—two—three—"

"I'm lost, mister," Conant lied quickly, sparring for time while his deep eyes searched the junipers for sight of the man. He could see no one.

"Four—five!" the voice finished relentlessly.

Before Conant could dodge, a shot rang out from the clearing. Conant braced himself for the shock of lead, but nothing struck him. He whipped out his own gun, and crouched forward. Before he had taken two steps the gun roared again. A bullet struck him under the lower jaw and came out through his neck. He felt a dizzy rush of pain. That shot had been meant to kill! It was murder—cold-blooded murder! Then a second shot struck him in the leg.

Conant knew that only swift action could save him. With blood running into his shirt he forced himself back to the side of his horse and with a superb effort of will, dragged himself into the saddle.

He gave the animal his head and swayed drunkenly in the saddle. Weakness permeated his gaunt body and he tried to stave off unconsciousness by counting until the count became a jumble in his head. He was in desperate need of help and there was nobody here to help him. Some instinct prompted him to clamp his hand against the wound in his neck and stop the flow of blood. As though they were a half-forgotten dream, he remembered some of the tales he had heard of the Massacre Flat with its vicious mistress, and its ghost wolves.

Out of the jumble of pain and distress came the realization that his horse had stopped. Darkness hemmed him in, and he felt an overpowering desire to rest—to slide into the unreal delirium of pain which saturated his weary body. The next moment he struck the earth though he was unaware of having slipped from the saddle.

How long he lay in that stupor of pain he did not know. He awoke once to feel the warmth of sunlight on his face. He glimpsed a circling mass of juniper and pinon trees which appeared to be moving about him in a slow, steady circle. His mouth was cotton and his eyes were sores. His horse was nowhere in sight. Again he slipped into unconsciousness, and again he awoke. He knew, suddenly, that he was about to die, and the thought startled him, for he had never thought objectively of death.

The next time he awoke it was dusk and he was startled by a feeling of recuperation. He moved and felt the tight compress on his hip. He touched the wound in his neck and found it neatly bandaged. His lips were moist, and painfully turning his head, he saw a canteen and a pot of warm broth. Hunger made him reach for the broth, and despite the pain of swallowing he drank it all. He was surprised to find his gun and belt lying within easy reach.

HE LAY there thankful for the food and water, and then began to wonder who had brought them. Certainly not the man who had shot him. He dozed but did not

fall entirely asleep, and he realized that he was waiting for something to happen—waiting for the one who had taken care of him.

When it was totally dark, a voice spoke out of the darkness. A timid voice which was filled with a note of worship.

"Are—are you all right?"

At first Conant did not answer because he recalled the voice in the clearing which had ordered him off the flat.

"I'm all right, thanks to you," he finally replied. "Who are you?" The wound in his neck forced him to speak in a low, husky voice.

"Does it matter?" the girl's voice said quickly.

"I reckon it matters a lot, miss. You saved my life. Come close so that I can see you."

"I am close. It's too dark and you would not like to see me."

Conant frowned. "Why do you say that?"

"Because I'm Della Sutton," the girl replied bitterly.

Conant resented the bitterness. "Why did you save me, Della?" he asked quietly.

"Because they mean to kill you. They think you're already dead or have run back down the trail. But I'll fool them! I saved you because you're good—because I have never touched a man like you," the girl said breathlessly.

"How do you know I'm good, Della?" Conant insisted, feeling a strange attraction for this girl.

"The voices told me. Do you ever hear voices inside of you?" There was a note of pleading in her voice.

Conant was puzzled by this question. This girl had evidently lived much alone.

"I have voices inside of me," Conant said slowly. "They tell me that you are beautiful, Della Sutton."

The girl caught her breath and he reached out and touched her. She was a mere outline in the darkness.

"The voices are wrong," the girl whispered. "I'm not—not beautiful."

"The voices tell me that you have golden hair curling about your shoulders. They tell me you have blue eyes, honest eyes. They tell me your skin is white and fair and that your lips are red," Conant said intimately.

He did not know he was being cruel. Her hair was not golden. It was black and hung in a tight braid down her back. Her eyes were brown. Her skin was almost Indian red from the sun, and her lips were parched by the dry winds of the high plateau.

Conant was puzzled by her long silence and when she did reply there was a note of calm determination in her words.

"I'm glad you think I'm beautiful. Always believe that. I must go now, or they'll miss me."

Hearing the light rustle of her feet as she crept away, Conant called, "Hey, wait a minute! I want to ask you some questions!"

The effort of raising his voice brought a rush of pain from his wound so he lay still, panting. Della Sutton made no response to his call, forcing him to wait and puzzle over the strange things which he had found.

CHAPTER II

THE MEETING

LEE CONANT hoped the girl would return in the daylight so that he could see her properly, but she did not return until the following night when she brought more food and fresh water. She changed his bandages, having previously cut open his levis so that she could get at the wound in his hip.

When she had finished with the bandage on his throat, he caught her hand and drew her close to him.

"You're an angel, Della," he said softly. "I've been thinking about you all day."

"Who are you, and why have you come here?" she countered, avoiding his eyes which probed the dark.

"I'm Lee Conant. I lost a herd of cattle up near the Hovenweep Monument, and I lost my brother Paul. I trailed the herd south until I reached the river below the mesa. The tracks disappeared. There have been other herds stolen between The Crossing of the Fathers and the four-corners country, but no one has ever been killed. I've got to find Paul. If he's dead—well, I reckon——"

"He's not here," she said too quickly.

"You must not look for him. I've told you they'll kill you if they find you here."

"I don't believe anybody would kill a wounded man—not anybody in the West," Conant disputed her.

"You don't know Jude Fancet. He's not really human. If I told you everything about him you'd say I was crazy. They kill in strange ways so that they can't be charged with murder, but they kill just the same."

"Who do you mean by 'they'?"

"It doesn't matter. You've got to get away from here."

"Would you go with me?" Conant dared her.

"You wouldn't want me. I'm nobody. You're the first person who has ever treated me kindly," the girl said fervently.

"Is Fancet holding any Long-C cattle here, Della?" Conant asked.

"I don't know," Della said breathlessly.

Conant believed she was lying, but could not understand why. He tried to question her further, tried to trip her up into telling what she evidently was afraid to tell, but her obvious terror brought him a feeling of shame.

For five days she came at night, always resisting his entreaties to come during the daylight. His wounds healed quickly and by the fifth day he was able to get up and hobble about. He tried to find his boots, but Della had hidden them, evidently expecting that he might try to get away from this hiding place. In the darkness during their evening talks he had come to feel a strange attraction for Della Sutton. Once she became almost jolly as she kidded him about her golden hair and blue eyes, but he did not know why her kidding had such a sharp edge.

ON THE sixth day Della did come in the daylight. She came in haste, riding like a boy on a bare-backed horse. She came quite close to him before she flung herself to the ground and for a moment Lee Conant was dumbfounded by the sight of her. Not until then did he realize how cruel had been his fancied description of her.

She had loosed her black hair, and it hung in a wild cloud about her shoulders. She had made a crude attempt to beautify her plain face with cosmetics. She had too much powder on and rouge in the wrong places. Her unpracticed hand had applied the lipstick too generously and not evenly enough. She stood before Conant with a defiant smile crinking the corners of her mouth as though to say, "Now I am beautiful, am I not?"

Conant felt guilty and ashamed. It was true that he had not thought of her as being so plain, but this desperate attempt on her part to acquire the glamour he had so innocently attributed to her, struck him as a ghastly joke. He did not know what to say, for his feelings at that moment would have been hard to convey without hurting the girl. She saved him the necessity of comment by exclaiming:

"Jude suspects that you're here. They questioned me. They saw me leaving at night and wanted to know where I had gone. Even Matty Sutton, my mother, suspects me. You've got to get away!"

Lee Conant rose stiffly to his lame leg and put a hand gently on her arm. "Thanks, Della," he said softly. "I'll need my boots and my horse."

"Wait here," she bade him, and left, soon to return with his boots in one hand and his horse following her as though she were an old friend.

Conant took the boots and unobtrusively ran his hand inside the right one to feel for his badge. It was still there, and he studied the girl's face to discover if she suspected the truth about him. He found only a glowing anxiety in her eyes.

"Hurry!" she admonished him.

Then a strange, husky voice said from just behind Della, "There is no need to hurry."

Della whipped about as though she had been slapped.

"Maxine!" she gasped. "Why have you come here?"

Conant stared at this strange girl with ill-disguised curiosity. Where Della Sutton was plain and shy, Maxine was golden, vital, utterly lovely. It was she who had the golden hair, the flawless skin just touched with tan, and blue eyes which could be bold and soft by turns.

"Since when have you the right to question me?" Maxine asked in an even voice tinged slightly with pity. "When I found you using my cosmetics, it dawned on me

that something unusual had come into your life. I see now that I was right," she smiled softly at Conant. "Give this cowboy a shave and a haircut and he'd be rather handsome. You couldn't be Remmy who was coming up from Polvadera to rep for Huston?"

Lee Conant's mind worked fast. To him the girl's words were a riddle and yet they were the first insight into the kind of business transacted here on Massacre Flat.

"I could be," he lied. "Huston didn't tell me I was going to be shot at. He said to take the south trail because it would be safe from snooping lawmen. Della Sutton figures I might get myself killed up here. I want to see Jude Fancet."

"I'm Maxine Fancet," Maxine said with a proud toss of her head.

"You—you're going to lead him into trouble, Max," Della warned tensely.

"Go wash your face, Della. You look idiotic with that make-up smeared across it," Maxine jeered. Then, turning to Conant she remarked loud enough for Della to hear, "You must forgive her, Remmy. She's a little crazy, but harmless."

The cruel bluntness of the girl's words were like a dagger thrust and yet they had been spoken in such a way as to give an impression of gentle pity. Maxine Fancet was either a very vicious woman, or one who had been misguided by her environment. Conant's reaction to her blunt criticism of the girl who had saved his life was one of anger.

Stepping around Maxine, he hobbled to Della's side and with his bandana he wiped the unspilled tears from her brown eyes. Then he wiped off the make-up.

"You don't need that stuff to make you beautiful, Della," he said softly. "I reckon God put more beauty under the skin than he did on the surface."

"She wants you," Della whispered brokenly. "She's jealous."

Conant lowered his voice so that only Della could hear and said, "Go home. Don't talk about me. I'll explain later." Then, as though to prove the compliments he had given her, he lowered his head and kissed her.

When Della had gone, Maxine smiled at him a soft, disarming smile. "It was generous of you to be kind to her. But you are being cruel. She thinks she's in love with you and that you love her. That would be a horrible thing because she's not normal. She lives out on the range most of the time. She herds her few sheep which keep her and her mother in food, and she talks mostly to her dog."

"And what do you do besides look beautiful?" Conant demanded, running his eyes over the girl's hand-tooled boots, her beaded doeskin riding shirt, and silk shirt of vivid red.

Maxine's sensuous lips drew into a firm line. "I run Massacre Flat, although Jude Fancet, my father, thinks he's the boss," she retorted. "If you can ride, I'll take you to the house".

Conant, deliberately taunting her, replied, "I can ride if you'll help me pull on my boots."

She flushed a delicate rose which seemed to well up from the rolled-back collar of the flaming shirt. For a moment their eyes clashed and then she stooped and picked up one of the boots. For a second Conant felt a vague misgiving for he had forgotten the star badge fastened inside his right boot. But he had nothing to fear, for Maxine held the boot delicately as though it were something unclean, and avoided looking at it. He slipped his foot inside and as she tugged to pull it on, he reached down and caught her hand. The feel of her soft skin shocked him.

"You're game," he grinned. "I just wanted to see if you had the spunk."

While their hands still touched, Maxine looked up at him, her eyes curiously puzzled.

"You're a strange man, Remmy," she said slowly. "We expected somebody tough, with two guns on his hips and curses in his mouth."

"And I didn't expect to be shot at when I got here," Conant replied, withdrawing his hand and pulling on his boot. He sat down to pull the boot on his wounded leg but even then he had difficulty and it was Maxine who pulled it on. He buckled on his gun and belt.

Before mounting his horse, Conant picked up the canteen and pot which Della had left there. He wanted to talk to Della before meeting Jude Fancet, hoping that she could tell him enough about Remmy and

Huston to help him get by with his impersonation.

Beside Maxine Fancet he rode out of the junipers and down a gradual slope until

they came to a rather large basin which was fenced and cross-fenced and plotted into fields of bright, green alfalfa. The trail had turned slightly toward the south and the basin lay almost at the edge of the plateau, not far from the place up which Conant had climbed.

At the bottom of the basin, near the south rim, stood a jumble of rocks like a monument. A good-sized pond glistened before the rocks and it was kept filled by springs which boiled up from the ground. At the lower end of the pond stood an open shed with its back built against the face of the rock wall.

They rode by the pond, and rounding the jutting shoulder of a low hill, came upon a large, whitewashed house surrounded by several other log and mud buildings. Directly toward the white house Maxine led him.

Conant, missing nothing, saw the magnificent horses behind the wire. In a large pasture he saw cattle bearing the tallow-pot brand! His practiced eye could tell by the condition of the cattle and by the way they used their tender hoofs that they had recently been driven far and hard. The only tallow-pot brand he could recall was in southern Colorado. He remembered the ghost herd which he had heard that night at the Metatakin Ruin. Perhaps they, too, had been spirited up to the plateau, but how?

Maxine's voice startled him out of his thoughts. "Della and her mother live in that cabin yonder," the girl said, pointing her slim finger at a log structure of not more than two rooms.

Conant seized upon this opportunity to talk to Della, and said casually, "I'll stop in and give them the canteen and pot."

"Don't be a fool," Maxine said, dashing his hopes, "Della is probably out in the woods dreaming about you. Her mother works for me in the big house. She can take the things home."

The next moment they rode down a shaded lane toward the big, whitewashed house, and he saw Jude Fancet standing on the porch.

CHAPTER III

AN INTRUDER

FANCET was a big man, and yet despite his size he appeared vaguely effeminate. This was not due to the black broadcloth suit and starched shirt he wore, but rather to his blue, long-lashed eyes and small, full mouth. There was weakness in his features, but his voice was gruff and suspicious. Conant knew how difficult it was going to be to fool this man.

"Who is this, Max?" he asked the girl.

"Remmy. That fool, Larson, shot him when he came up the south rim. Larson was on watch that night."

"Larson didn't report having shot anybody," Fancet said slowly. "Where have you been? Who's been taking care of you?"

Conant hesitated about bringing Della into the conversation, believing that she might be punished, but Maxine saved him the trouble of answering.

"Della found him, and saved his life," Maxine said and laughing merrily, added, "She hoped to save him for herself as though he were a lost dog to be adopted."

"Come in the house," Fancet said, scowling at Maxine.

As Conant stepped into the room, he was bewildered by the elegance he found there. Plush rugs, real lace curtains, and brass andirons before the marble fireplace. There was even a piano among the substantial furnishings. Conant knew the value of such things packed up here into the back country of hell, and he realized that Jude Fancet must run a very profitable business.

Fancet startled him out of his thoughts with, "If you're Remmy, why are you riding a Slash-C horse?"

Conant had overlooked his brand but his mind worked swiftly. "An Apache scout came down from the Hovenweep with a herd of cayuses. I reckon most of them

were stolen. I liked the looks of this one and traded for it."

"What word did Huston send?" Fancet asked bluntly.

Conant hit upon a subterfuge to hide his ignorance of the truth. "He said he gave you all the information in the letter," he lied desperately. If there was no letter he could claim it must have been lost.

"What letter?" Fancet was persistent.

"The letter he mailed you through Torento. Didn't you get it?"

Fancet shook his head and his long-lashed eyes scowled suspiciously.

Maxine broke in, "Matty brings the mail up from Torento. Della brings it over here. Perhaps she lost it."

A look of annoyance swept across Fancet's face and his slim hand twisted the waxed mustache which adorned his girlish mouth.

"Don't bother Matty with it," he said emphatically.

"Why not?" Maxine said with a toss of her golden head, and before he could reply she was at the door leading from the room. She called Matty Sutton, who at the time was working in the big house, and Matty soon appeared at the door.

After a few low words, Maxine turned back into the room and said, "She insists there was no letter."

CONANT, seeking to escape further questioning until he could learn more of what he was up against, sagged into a chair. Because the pallor of his face was genuine, his words rang true.

"I reckon I'm weaker than I figured, Fancet. My leg wound is broke open and is bleeding. Could—could I lie down for a spell?"

Jude Fancet cursed under his breath. "Call Matty, she'll take care of him," he said.

"I'll take care of him myself," Maxine smiled. "Come on, cowboy, you can have Jude's room. He can sleep in the bunkhouse with the men for a night or two."

Conant was startled by the girl's high-handed manner, for he had come prepared to accept Jude Fancet as the boss on the Massacre. Either he was as weak as his face depicted or he loved his daughter very much.

Conant followed the girl into the large, cool room, and while Maxine went to get him something to eat, he slipped off his boots and outer clothing and crawled into bed. Noticing that the bandage on his hip was wet with fresh blood, he wadded up his shirt and placed it under the bandage so that the blood would not stain the covers.

He was still arranging the shirt when Maxine returned with some warm food and she insisted upon changing the bandage at once. She was clumsy at it because she had a natural aversion to the messy job, but she stuck to it until it was done. Della had done a much better job.

Maxine knelt at the head of the bed when she was done and caressed his hot forehead with her cool hand.

"What are you thinking of?" she asked softly.

"Of Della," he answered honestly.

With a smirk of anger Maxine leaped to her feet and struck him across the face. "You cad!" she raged, and fled haughtily from the room.

Conant chuckled. She was jealous—she could not accept the thought that Della had become desirable in the eyes of a man. Reaching for the food she had left near the bed, Conant ate hungrily and then dozed. He did not try to think. At dusk a voice spoke very near him and he looked up into Matty Sutton's face.

A lamp had been lighted on the big dresser and the yellow light threw Matty's face into sharp relief. It was a strong face, big-boned, and etched fiercely with living. It seemed strange that she should be working as a servant for Jude Fancet. Though her body was overweight and she walked with the slow grace of an aging woman, she gave one the impression of being infinitely more intelligent and composed than Fancet.

Matty said simply, "There's no need to clutter up this house, Remmy. I've arranged a place for you in my cabin."

Conant felt a rush of relief, for here was the opportunity to get away from Jude Fancet and Maxine for a while at least.

"I reckon that would be best, ma'am," he said with a wry smile. "I don't feel right about putting Fancet out of his bed."

Without a word she helped him dress, and followed him as he hobbled into the

hall. Maxine and Jude Fancet confronted them as they passed the living-room door.

"What do you mean by this, Matty?" Maxine demanded angrily.

"He should not be cluttering up this house," Matty said calmly, as though the girl's anger was of no consequence.

"Perhaps Matty's right," Jude Fancet said evasively.

"You always give in to her!" Maxine stormed.

Just then, out on the range rose a weird, inhuman cry, and Maxine said tensely, "It's the wolves—they're prowling again."

Matty turned and walked outside and Conant limped after her. He had a curious feeling that Matty Sutton was the strongest of all these extraordinary people. He could not account for this because to him she was just the mother of a half-wit girl and a charwoman for Jude Fancet.

As they walked to Matty's cabin, Conant saw a half-dozen tough-looking men working a bunch of cattle in a big corral behind the white house. He wanted to get a look at those cattle, but he knew that at present such a thing would be impossible.

He followed Matty into her cabin and in the lamplight he saw that the first room they entered was a kitchen and dining room combined, spotlessly clean and frugally furnished. Matty drew him into a bedroom across one end of which blankets had been hung as a screen.

"You can sleep behind those blankets in Della's bed," Matty said evenly. "Della can sleep with me in the big bed."

Conant looked about eagerly for the girl but she was not there.

"Where's Della?" he asked calmly.

"God knows. She's out on the range somewhere."

"But the wolves?"

"Nothing on the Massacre would harm Della," Matty shrugged.

Later, as Conant lay in the bed behind the blankets, he heard Matty undress and retire. She turned the lamp down to a dull glow and silence entered the room. Conant lay there reviewing the curious situation he had blundered into and wondered if he would find any trace of his cattle or his brother Paul. He tried to keep awake because he wanted to talk to Della, but exhaustion defeated his resolve and he dozed.

During the night he awoke and before he had opened his eyes he was conscious of another near the bed. There was something pressing on the covers and to his surprise Della's cool lips touched his mouth gently. He heard her praying under her breath:

"He's mine. Don't let her take him away from me. Maxine has everything. She has the hair, the eyes, the skin he loves. But she's bad, God. You know she's bad!"

Conant felt embarrassed by his glimpse into the strange girl's soul, and he knew it would be cruel to let her know that he had heard her prayer. He lay still for a moment and then shifted uneasily as though just awakening from sleep. Afraid that she might escape him in panic, he reached out and took her hand.

"Don't go, Della," he said. "I was dreaming of you. I thought you were talking to me. Is your mother asleep?"

"Yes." She did not try to pull away from him.

"I'm in bad trouble," he whispered. He went on to tell her why he had decided to play the part of Remmy. "Do you know anything about Huston at Polvadera? About Remmy?"

"Matty has a letter from Polvadera," Della whispered.

Conant tensed. His mention of a letter had been a lie, a bid for time. If Matty had such a letter she had kept it secret from Fancet. Why?

"It might mean the difference between life and death if I could read that letter. Could you find it?" he asked.

"I know where it is," the girl said diffidently, and withdrawing her hand from his, she slipped away.

Soon she returned and thrust an envelope into his hand. "If Matty learns of this, she will beat me," Della said with suppressed emotion.

Conant winced. It was unnatural that a mother and daughter should be so arraigned against each other, but he felt in his heart that Della and Matty Sutton were enemies. He felt guilty about reading the letter and yet so much depended upon his knowing what it contained that he could not refuse.

The envelope had been opened and he slipped the single sheet of paper into his hand. Without a word Della opened the

blankets enough so that the dull glow of the lamp filtered through. Conant read:

> Fancet: I'm running a barge up to the foot of the Massacre three weeks from today. Remmy will be there to count the stock and sign the papers. I have not told him about this letter because I do not entirely trust him. I have good reason to believe that he has been cheating me. I want you to keep a count of the cattle so that I can check with you after he delivers them. Under no circumstances let him know that I suspect him. . . .
>
> HUSTON.
>
> P. S.—I'm trading this shipment direct to Madrillo on the Rio Encitos.

Conant and the girl were so immersed in their mutual concern over the letter that they did not see Matty Sutton watching them through the opening in the curtains.

The letter gave Conant enough facts to enable him to bluff his way indefinitely. His wild guess about a letter was a point against him, for he was not supposed to know about it, but Huston's pointed request that he be unmolested was a guarantee of safety for the time being. He slipped the letter back into the envelope and handed it to the girl.

Her hand shook when she took it, and he realized how much she had risked in bringing it to him. Despite Maxine's avowal that Della was crazy, he felt that she was the most sincere and vital person he had ever met.

"Thanks, Della," he said softly. "I heard the wolves howl tonight and I was afraid for you. It was more than fear. It was a feeling I had never experienced before."

The girl shuddered and said quietly, "When the wolves howl like that, someone will die before the moon changes."

Conant was irritated by her words as though they confirmed Maxine's statement that this girl was insane.

"You had better go to bed before your mother awakes and suspects us," he told her.

IN THE morning it was Della who called him for breakfast and served him. Matty plodded about cleaning the house like an ordinary charwoman. When he had eaten, Conant remarked:

"I'd better go up to the house and talk business with Fancet. There are things he must know before the week is out."

Before Conant could leave, Maxine came to the door demanding to see him. Matty greeted her, but tersely refused to let her in.

"He's not well enough for visitors," the woman lied.

"You old crone!" Maxine stormed. "How dare you tell me what I can do?"

"This is my house," Matty said firmly. "Hasn't Jude taught you any manners?"

"He has taught me reading, writing, and sums, but he can't teach me how to run my heart," Maxine retorted.

"I sometimes doubt that you have a heart, Maxine," Matty said with an undertone of pity. "Tell Jude to come down here."

Jude came as he was bidden, though Conant had not sized him up as a man who took orders from his cook. They talked at length about the business Remmy was supposed to have come for. Conant, with the facts he had learned in the letter, made up a plausible story and Jude Fancet became convinced that Lee Conant was Remmy.

During their conversation Matty worked in the bedroom but the door was open so that she might hear everything they said.

Through their conversation Conant learned that stolen cattle were brought to the Massacre and then sold to unscrupulous buyers down the river. He did not learn how the cattle were brought up to the Massacre and taken back down to the river. Certainly not up the steep, narrow trail he had followed.

When they had finished their discussion, Jude Fancet said, "It's all settled, then. We'll count the cattle when you're ready and you can sign for them. The barges should be at the foot of the cliffs in five days. You've got a couple of days to rest if you need it."

CHAPTER IV

A GRIM BARGAIN

CONANT used the two days to explore the Massacre and neither Fancet nor Matty Sutton objected to him roaming the high plateau unmolested. He came upon small bunches of cattle and occasionally met some of the tough-looking riders who worked for Fancet. The brands on the cattle had been cleverly worked over but Conant's practiced eye was not deceived.

The first day he found no trace of his own herd. He found plenty of traces of Maxine, though. Regardless of how carefully he tried to avoid her, she insisted upon overtaking him and riding with him. The two days of rest Fancet had promised him, stretched on into a week.

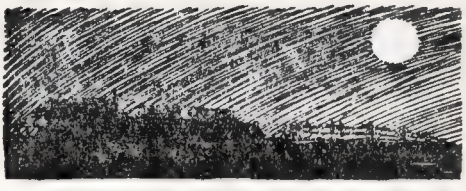
One day he came upon Jude Fancet's men working over a herd of cattle which had been held in a small pasture about a mile from the main ranch. Maxine was with him, and she pointed out Jim Slath, Fancet's foreman who was bossing the branding party. Slath was built like a bull, heavy neck and shoulders as wide as a door. His black hair was shaggy and hung below his wide hat and his booming voice reached them above the milling of the herd.

"That's Jim Slath," Maxine said. "He has everybody scared of him but me. Fancet keeps him on because Slath has no conscience and he's the fastest shot this side of the Pecos. I've seen him knock a cow down with his fist. He treats everybody like dirt but me."

Conant half heard her description of the big, active man, for he noticed the brand on some of the cattle they were working over. He edged closer to the milling herd to make sure of what he suspected and then cursed inwardly to find that they were his own lost herd.

His mind suddenly began to drift off into a crazy pattern of thought. If his cattle were here, then Paul must either be here, or these people knew where he was. Perhaps he was being held a prisoner until the cattle was disposed of.

So engrossed was he in his thoughts that Conant was not prepared for what happened next. Without warning, Slath cut two wild steers from the herd and without



seeming to do so, headed them for Conant and the girl. By the time Conant saw the cattle coming, it was too late to get out of the way, the steers split around him.

Slath thundered after the steers on his big black horse and threw his rope, ostensibly to catch one of the steers, but the rope settled too expertly over Conant's head to have been an accident. Slath's horse reared back and Conant was jerked savagely from the saddle. He fell hard, fortunately on his unwounded leg, and his hat rolled for some distance.

Slath came charging up, his beefy face flushed. "What are you cluttering up the range for? We're hard working hands trying to do a job. Get out!" Then, turning to Maxine, he added, "Has Fancet decided to hire you a chaperone, Max?"

Without looking at Conant who was struggling out of the rope, Slath rode over and neatly picked up Conant's hat from the ground by leaning from the saddle. He turned and tossed the hat toward Conant, but the wind caught it and began to blow it to one side. Then, so swift that the action was invisible, Slath pulled his single-action forty-four and fanned the trigger twice. The

two bullets caught the hat in mid-air and directed it to Conant's feet.

"Take your hat and get out!" Slath roared, and the taunt in his words stung Conant.

Conant rose slowly and pulled his hat on. He realized that Slath had put on this show for a purpose, but he was puzzled as to the purpose until he noticed how Slath looked at Maxine, who sat rigid and flushed in her saddle. There was more than friendship in that look—there was desire and something more subtle than brute desire.

"Some day, Slath, you're going to be killed," Maxine said fiercely. "I hate you."

Slath shook his head and his thick lips curved in a smile. "No, Max, you don't hate me. You love power too much yourself. You're not the type to love a coyote."

Conant realized that Slath was taunting, hoping to make him fight and take a beating before Maxine. Conant mounted, turned his horse and rode away with Maxine hurrying after him.

When they had gone on in silence for a while, she said tensely, "I hadn't pictured you in the role of coward, Remmy. Why didn't you stand up to him? I know he's big, brutal and a wizard with a gun, but you could have tried."

"He would have killed me—he wanted an excuse," Conant said quietly.

"If he had, I would have killed him," Maxine said definitely.

Conant avoided further argument, but inside of him a seething volcano burned. He had to go back and face Slath—but he had to do it alone. There were things he must know. Maxine left him with the parting retort:

"Perhaps I was all wrong. Della Sutton might be good enough for you, Remmy."

WHEN she had disappeared into the big house, Conant mounted and rode back to the herd. Slath watched curiously as Conant rode up, dismounted, and hung his gun across his saddle horn. He removed his Stetson, and idly poked his lean fingers through the bullet holes Slath had put there. Most of the riders had gone away with the branded cattle, but two by the name of Rankin and Smith sat their horses on either side of Slath.

"I reckon, Slath," Conant said evenly, "I owe you something for giving me back my sombrero the way you did. Do you think you've got the guts to come down and collect it like a man?"

For a moment the affrontery of the challenge shocked Slath into silence, and then he roared with laughter.

"Why, damn me," he gasped, "if the coyote ain't showin' his teeth!"

He swung from the saddle with easy grace for one of his bulk, and shed his guns as he hit the ground. Conant saw Slath's big fists which could fell a bull. He saw the bulging muscle of the man's wide shoulders and he knew that Slath had the power to kill him with his hands. Conant's

wounded leg hampered him some, but the wound of his throat would not interfere unless Slath hit him there.

Slath came charging in without any preliminary sparring. He took one mighty swing, but Conant, realizing that only agility and skill could save him, dodged like a shadow and Slath was almost thrown off his feet by the force of his own blow. Slath swung again and missed.

Conant, taking advantage of Slath's momentary confusion, slid in close and threw two short hooks to Slath's ribs. Slath grunted, snarled a curse and lunged at Conant with both hands, hoping to grab hold of the shadow which eluded him.

Breathing hard, Conant knew he must avoid those thick arms. Once caught in their crushing embrace all hell could not save him. His back would be snapped like a twig. Slath's fingers tangled in Conant's flannel shirt, but Conant tore free, leaving shreds of cloth in Slath's hands.

Conant dodged in under Slath's arms, and hammered his fist into Slath's right eye. Slath rocked backward with the blow, and Conant followed with a stinging blow to Slath's mouth. Conant became over-eager.

Slath's fist caught him on the side of the head and only the fact that he was rolling with the blow saved him. As it was, the wound of his neck exploded in a fury of pain.

For minutes the fight became one of weird design with Slath wheezing for breath and trying to kill with one blow, and Conant dodging desperately and planting his blows where they would tell most. Slath's right eye closed. Conant landed a blow on Slath's left eye. Before long the bellowing, wheezing giant was staggering blindly about wasting his strength in blows which seldom landed.

From then on, Conant felt a little ashamed of his advantage. He hit Slath at will and though he was unable to knock him out, he cut him up systematically. Conant, horribly tired, was unaware of Maxine riding up to watch the torture. He knew only that he must knock Slath down, but Slath refused to fall. Anxious to end the slaughter, Conant became reckless. Head down, he drove his fist for Slath's stomach.

Before his fist landed, one of Slath's floundering blows caught him on the side of the head near his wounded neck. A vicious pain exploded in his head and he felt his knees buckle. He went down on one knee, groping blindly for something to hold on to. Slath barged in!

Then Maxine's voice cried shrilly, "Slath, you fool, don't kill him! He's Remmy, Huston's rep!"

Slath stopped momentarily as though struck and across his bruised and battered face passed a look of utter surprise. It even seemed that his swollen lips tried to smile. That respite was all Conant needed. Shaking the blear from his eyes, he launched himself from his knee and putting all the weight of his body behind the blow, he struck Slath on the chin. Sagging at the knees, Slath fell in a grotesque heap and lay still.

Rankin and Smith would have attacked Conant if Maxine had not stopped them. Conant mounted his horse and headed wearily for the ranch. Maxine caught up with him.

"Slath has never been knocked down before," Maxine said with a note of warning. "You were wonderful, but I can't say you were wise."

Conant did not answer her directly. He ached all over and he wanted to be alone, so refusing her offer to wash and tend to his bruises, he headed for Matty's cabin. Matty, he knew, would be at the big house and Della would be out on the range.

He was wrong, because when he entered the cabin, Della was waiting for him and she had water heating on the stove.

"How did you know?" he asked softly, indicating the kettle.

There was understanding in her brown eyes, and eager pride on her comely face.

"I saw the fight from the trees. It is the first time evil has been defeated upon the Massacre. It's a good omen."

STRANGELY enough he did not resent her treatment of his wounds and bruises as he would have resented Maxine. Della's personality did not impinge upon him with

such erotic force, but rather it quieted and coerced his emotions into stability. Maxine, though visibly more desirable, inflamed and consumed rather than nourished his spirit.

After dinner that night, because he had so much to think out, he went alone to the dark perimeter of the corral listening to the night sounds of the horses munching hay. He tried to imagine how his cattle had arrived on the Massacre, and wondered how he might discover what had become of Paul.

A slash of light reached out from the bunkhouse and touched him. Somebody had opened the door. Realizing the vulnerability of his position, he flattened against the corral posts hoping to escape detection, but Slath's gruff voice warned him that he was being deliberately hunted.

"Don't pull your gun," Slath said flatly. "I reckon I owe you jugful of hell for what you done to me today, but I aim to overlook it. We can help each other."

Conant tensed, grimly aware that he had not even thought to bring his gun along. "How?" he asked without moving.

"You're not Remmy," Slath said bluntly. "I know Remmy and I know you're a spy. I'm willing to keep quiet on one condition."

"What condition?" Conant asked, not bothering to deny the truth of Slath's statements.

"Stay away from Maxine. You've come here to fight Fancet. Good. I hope you cut his guts out. Everything on the Massacre has been built up for Maxine's benefit. I don't know why, because she don't appreciate it, but I mean to have her and everything that goes with her."

"Why should you make a deal with me, Slath?" Conant asked suspiciously. "You don't exactly love me."

"If I killed you," Slath said slowly, "it would queer my whole game. She never would speak to me. I can't kill Fancet for the same reason, but you can kill him."

Conant considered for a moment. After all, he had little choice. If Slath unmasked him as a spy he would have to escape from the Massacre without finding out what he had come to learn. He would have little chance in an open fight against them all.

"It's a deal," he said, wondering what the bargain might lead to.

"Let me show you what will happen to you if you get absent-minded about the business," Slath said, leading the way on foot toward the junipers which grew darkly among the hills in back of the ranch.

Not far within the thick growth of trees, Slath paused in a clearing. He felt his way along a row of crosses which were barely visible in the dark. At last he struck a match, holding it to a small board nailed to a white cross.

"This is the last one we buried," Slath said gruffly. "It wasn't a pretty sight. We managed to get all that the wolves left, into one box."

Conant read the short inscription while grief and hate and fury crawled over him in a hot, stinging flood. The words, which were delicately lettered as only the slim, girlish hand of Fancet could have lettered them, read:

PAUL CONANT
Killed by wolves Aug 14.

WITH a low laugh rippling in his big chest, Slath turned and rode back toward the ranch without waiting for Conant to follow him. Conant stood with his head bared, and though he was unused to praying, he did pray for Paul.

He understood the whole deal now. Paul had trailed the rustlers and had discovered the way by which the cattle had been brought up to the Massacre. He could not be allowed to escape with that knowledge, so he had been fiendishly done away with in such a way that the murder could not be proved in court.

Conant could not trust himself to go back to the cabin in his present frame of mind, so he started to walk blindly through the trees. He walked without trails, the branches striking him like invisible hands. He had to think—think—think.

He came to a draw where the trees ended and the brush grew thick. Suddenly he stopped dead still. There was a strange glow in the brush which seemed to emanate from the earth, and before Conant could move there came the unearthly cry of the ghost wolves!

Terror prickled his skin and he remembered Paul and the other crosses in the clearing. His first impulse was to run, but he knew how useless that would be. Then, to his consternation, he heard Della Sutton's voice very near him.

"Don't be frightened," she said softly. "I saw you at the grave and I followed you. Stand very still, Lee."

Even as he stood rooted to the spot the four wolves took shape, their bodies outlined with a bluish light. He watched them circling warily as they closed in for the attack. He was unarmed. He wanted to shout at Della to run, but she seemed as unreal as the wolves—as though it was all a dream.

She walked directly toward the animals, making a low, soothing sound in her throat. At first the wolves continued to circle, their glowing manes bristling, but as the girl neared them, they subsided and crowded about her with whimpering sounds.

Soon the wolves slunk away, and, running up to the girl, Conant caught her in his arms. With a surge of emotion beyond the control of his will, he kissed her upon the mouth, and felt her tremble.

"They might have killed you," he said in a husky whisper.

"I'm the only one who can handle them," she said. "They belong to Fancet, but he's afraid of them. They're a cross between a dog and a wolf. An Indian taught them to kill and rubbed something under their hair which glows when their mane bristles. Fancet is afraid that some day the wolves will kill him, so he never goes out alone at night."

"Fancet is a murderer," Conant said grimly. "I haven't the authority to arrest him here, so I must trick him into following me north—"

"He'll never leave the Massacre," Della said quickly.

"Then," Conant said with decision, "I'll have to kill him here."

"That would be a mistake. I heard Slath talking to you tonight. He wants you to kill Fancet, that's why he showed you the grave. Before Fancet's body was cold Slath would kill you and become a hero. He would make Maxine believe he had killed you in defense of her father."

"My cattle have been stolen. My brother lies buried here on the Massacre and my own life has been threatened. Don't you figure I should do something about it?" Conant asked flatly.

"Of course. You've got to leave the Massacre."

"The trails are all guarded," he reminded her.

"There is one trail that is not guarded. I have seen them use it to get cattle off the flat, but in order to use this trail it is necessary to drain the water from the pond. It takes some time to do this, and before the pond was empty, they would be warned and come after you. But I'll help you all I can, even though they kill me for it," Della said emotionally.

Conant looked into her brown eyes and saw the goodness of her deep in them. His big hand closed over her small one and he said softly, "When I go, you are going with me, Della."

A sob caught in her throat. "I wanted to hear you say that, even though I know Maxine would never let it happen," she whispered. "But if I can't go, you will come back. Bring a Federal posse with you so that evil can be uprooted from the Massacre."

"What about your mother, Matty Sutton?" Conant asked.

"Matty must defend herself," the girl said coldly, as though she were speaking of a stranger. "Let's go home."

"I'm going to try and find a way off the Massacre tomorrow," he told her, as they rode back to the ranch.

They entered the house quietly so as not to awaken Matty, and Conant kissed Della good night before he slipped behind his curtain of blankets. Then he lay on the bed and listened to the girl undress and crawl into bed beside the sleeping woman.

CHAPTER V

UNMASKED

WHEN Conant awoke the sun was up. He dressed and started to pull on his boots when he discovered with a distinct shock that his badge was missing. At first he thought he might have lost it, but he discarded this theory when he realized how impossible it was.

If the badge had come loose, it would have fallen into his boot, and a search of the boot failed to disclose it.

For a moment Conant sat still, wondering who had taken it. Then, because he felt uneasy, he buckled on his gun and headed

resolutely for the kitchen. To his surprise, he found his law badge in full view on the old dresser near Matty's bed. Della would not have put it there. What did Matty intend to do with the knowledge she had gained? He could only wait and see.

Slipping the badge into his pocket, Conant walked into the kitchen where Della was calmly preparing his breakfast. Matty Sutton sat near the window ostensibly mending a bridle, but her eyes watched the north trail. Conant expected her to speak to him, but she did not even look toward him.

After Conant had eaten, Fancet came to the cottage and sat across the table from him.

"I want to get things settled, Remmy," Fancet said nervously. "If you're able, we'll go out and count the Tallow Pot cattle. I've got a lookout down on the river watching for the barges."

"What about the Slash-C cattle you doctored yesterday?" Conant asked steadily.

Fancet looked annoyed. "That's none of your business, Remmy. We have to keep them hidden awhile longer. My deal with Huston was for the Tallow Pot herd."

Conant was about to make a remark relative to Paul Conant's death, when the door to the cabin swung open to admit Slath and

a lean, dusty rider with red hair and off-center eyes.

"I'm Remmy," the redhead said without preliminaries. "I reckon I'm some late, but there's a posse makin' up in Arizona an' I didn't want 'em to trail me up here. We ain't got no time for dallyin', Fancet. Huston says if the barges can't make it, to trail the beef by way of the Metatakin Trail."

Fancet stood staring at Slath and the redhead. "Is this Remmy?" he asked Slath for confirmation.

"I reckon he is," Slath said, leering at Conant.

Then Matty Sutton spoke up from the window and said, "Of course he's Remmy. I was just wondering how long you would be taken in by that lawman, yonder."

Conant knew he must act fast. A gunfight in that small room would be fatal to him. He leaped to his feet and, whipping out his gun, he said as he backed toward the door:

"If any man moves, I'll kill him!"

Slath, his thick hands carefully kept in sight, snarled, "What's the matter, Fancet? Are you afraid to draw?"

Matty Sutton spoke calmly, "Let him go. There's no way off the Massacre. He'll be here for a long time—a very long time."

Conant realized how true Matty's dire prediction might prove for he would now be hunted both by the thugs Fancet hired and by the ghost wolves. He had no choice but to escape from the Massacre and try and return with the proper authorities to arrest Fancet and his crew. How difficult that escape would be, he was soon to learn.

As he ran for the corral, he found Della coming toward him with his horse saddled.

"I thought you might need him," she said quickly. "Hide and keep away from the wolves. I'll find you tonight."

But it was not Della who found him, it was Maxine. He came upon her suddenly after a day of futile searching for a trail that was not heavily guarded. She had discarded her riding clothes and rode sidesaddle in a flowered dress with a blossom thrust through her golden hair. She made such a lovely picture against the wild background that a sincere compliment slipped through his lips.

"You're beautiful Max," he said breathlessly.

"Thanks, cowboy. I wondered how long I would have to wait to hear you say that." She smiled softly and her eyes were not hard, but liquid blue.

"What do you want?" he asked her.

"I want you for one thing," she replied candidly. "You're trapped, aren't you?"

"Perhaps," he shrugged his wide shoulders.

"I'm trapped, too," she said desperately. Her blue eyes became furtive, and a shadow of resentment crossed her beautiful face. She held out her small, white hand toward him. "Take me away from here. You're not Remmy—you're a lawman. I want to go with you and live in a decent world."

"But where would you go?" Conant asked.

"With you."

"I don't love you."

"You think you don't because you're trying to repay Della for having saved your life. I'm beautiful, am I not? I'm desirable—at least the thugs on the Massacre think so. If you won't love me, somebody will. Just take me with you."

"Do you know how to get off the Massacre?" he asked, a little annoyed with Maxine's conceit.

"Yes. By the secret trail."

"We could never drain the pond without being caught," he objected, remembering what Della had told him.

"There's another way—a way known only to Fancet and myself. Meet me in the shed below the pond before dawn tomorrow. Be sure you are not followed."

She turned her face upward as she prepared to leave, her full, ripe lips inviting. Conant felt an irresistible desire to kiss them, and he cursed the disturbing power this girl had. Turning savagely, he rode into the trees alone. He had not gone far, when Della's voice came to him, soft and soothing as always. He was not surprised to find her there.

"I told you she would not let you take me," Della said without bitterness. "But she can't make me stop loving you, Lee."

"Maxine loves only herself," Conant said softly. "I reckon I've never been in love—I don't rightly know if I love you, Della. But I know that I'd rather stay here than go without you. If I find a way—if I leave the Massacre alive, you're going with me when I go."

"But how?"

"I'll find a way. Meet me an hour before dawn in the shed below the pond," he told her.

"No. I'm staying with you tonight, Lee," Della said evenly. "Matty and Fancet saw me help you escape. Slath has no reason, now, not to kill you. If I went back, they'd beat me."

"I don't believe it," Conant cut in.

"And if you stay out alone," she went on, ignoring his remark, "the wolves will get you. You might kill one of them, or two, but they sneak upon you suddenly. If I'm with you they won't bother us."

Because the girl's loyalty touched him, Conant said softly, "All right, Della, you can stay with me."

They found a sheltered spot, deep in the shadows of a rocky ledge and he held her hand until she fell asleep. He put his coat over her slim form and kept watch. Once he thought he heard the wolves prowling near, but some instinct must have warned them of the presence of the girl.

He dozed briefly before morning but every sense was alert even then. Finally, judging by the stars, he decided it was time to go to the shed so he gently awakened Della. The sullen darkness glinted from her eyes as she opened them, and a shy, sleepy smile curved her lips.

Conant bent down and kissed her gently. She sighed and said slowly:

"I wish this moment would never pass, Lee."

"It has already passed," he told her bluntly. "We must get to the shed before Maxine arrives."

Without questioning his actions, Della rose, shook out her long, dark hair and pushed her flannel shirt down neatly into the band of her Levis.

Arriving at the shed, Conant hid the horses in some cedars and then told Della to remain out of sight around the side of the shed. Maxine came as she had promised but dawn was already breaking by the time she arrived on her magnificent horse. Even now she looked fresh, and glamorous, though she wore Levis tucked into her boots and a red bandana knotted about her golden hair.

The shed was open in the front and the three sides consisted of posts sunk into the ground. The back of the building was against the cliff. After greeting him, Maxine dismounted and walking to the rear of the shed, she asked Conant to give her a

hand. They tugged at one of the poles in the rear wall of the shed and to Conant's dismay, a section of the wall swung outward and he was staring into the opening of a small tunnel.

"This is the escape trail I spoke of," the girl said quickly. "There is a larger tunnel which is closed by a bulkhead under the water of the pond. It leads down to the river. The water from the springs used to flow down there years ago. Fancet drains the pond, opens the tunnel and brings the cattle in and takes them out that way. But he was afraid that some day we would be trapped. He was always afraid, sometimes I think he was afraid of Matty Sutton, so he made this escape trail which leads into the larger tunnel a hundred feet down. Come, we must hurry and pull this door shut."

Amazed at Fancet's cleverness, Conant put a hand to her arm, and said, "Wait a minute, Maxine." Then he called softly.

When Della walked into the shed, Maxine's face froze into an expression of evil dismay.

"So you tricked me, after all," she said fiercely.

"Don't be angry, Max," Conant said sharply. "If I go, she goes. You have no cause to hate her except that I prefer her honesty and goodness to you."

A change came over Maxine, as though his words had convinced her. Her eyes softened and a fixed smile came to her lips.

"I said you would never have her, Lee," she said slowly, "and I am seldom wrong. Perhaps this time I am wrong. Of course she can go with you. Take these candles and drive the horses down ahead of you. I forgot something but I'll catch up with you."

Because it was getting too light for comfort, Conant spent no more time in argument. Herding the horses into the tunnel, he followed Della, who held the lighted candle. Maxine took her own horse and rode back toward the ranch, and though Conant was a little suspicious he believed that now she would be unable to do anything in time to stop them.

They descended cautiously until Conant noticed that the flame of the candle burned straight up and the smell of it lingered about them. Some distance from the top he stopped.

"There's no draft in here," he said curiously. "I reckon if the tunnel is open like Maxine says, there should be a strong current of air going through it."

"I have never been here before," Della said. "I never knew of this passage. I knew of the one under the pond but I was never allowed to remain there when they were moving cattle."

Suddenly a voice called from the top of the tunnel. "Don't go with him, Maxine! Don't leave me!"

"It's Matty," Della gasped, her hand which was holding the candle trembling as she spoke.

Conant tensed, for it was Matty Sutton's voice but he had never heard it like this before. Now it was filled with pleading and self-pity. He heard her stumbling down the incline, her rather heavy body blotting out the dim light of the tunnel's mouth. When she reached them she was distraught

and cried brokenly, but when she realized that Maxine was not there, she caught hold of herself.

"How did you know we were here?" Conant asked suspiciously.

"Della didn't come home last night," Matty said. "I was watching for her when

Maxine rode by. I knew something was up. I waited for Maxine to return, but she did not, so I dressed and took the short cut across the fields. Where's Maxine?"

"She went back for something," Conant said. "How do we get out of this place?"

"There's a log bulkhead below, which opens inward. It's very heavy," Matty explained.

Just then voices came clearly from the mouth of the tunnel. Maxine's voice said, "They're in there, Jude—the smart lawman and Della Sutton. He tried to make a fool of me and I hate him."

Jude Fancet's voice replied, "Matty Sutton is down there with them. Her horse is in the shed."

"What of it?" Maxine retorted.

"That makes it just fine," Jude said triumphantly. "I've been under her thumb ever since I came here. She was the real boss of the Massacre, Max. Twenty years ago, just after you were born, your father was hanged by some Vigilantes near the Crossing of the Fathers. He had been accused of stealing cattle, but all he had done was innocently buy up a stolen herd. Matty swore to get revenge upon the cattlemen, so she started this ranch and has been stealing cattle from the four-corners country every year since. She wanted you to grow up to be a lady so she hired me to pose as your father because I was educated and could teach you. She took Della Sutton to raise as her own, hoping it would make up for her loss of you."

"I never could believe you were my father," Maxine said tensely.

"I'm glad I'm not," Fancet went on quickly. "I've loved you for a long time, Maxine. She stood between us. But now it's over and we can have the Massacre for ourselves."

For a moment there was silence, then the sounds of feet moving away from the tunnel entrance. At last Conant said, "Is that all true, Matty?"

"Yes, it's true," Matty said woodenly.

"Then we've got to go back," Conant insisted.

Matty warned, "They'll be waiting up there to kill us."

But Jude Fancet did better than that. A trickle of water gurgled into the tunnel. The trickle quickly became a stream, and the stream increased with an ominous roar. The water tumbled past the three huddled in the tunnel.

"They've opened the floodgates!" Matty screamed. "The water can all be turned into this tunnel and it will back up against the bulkhead and drown us."

Suddenly the horses, with a snort of fear, turned and bolted past them, almost trampling them in the narrow space. Della said nothing, but she held Matty's hand and the three of them fought their way against the flood.

The rushing water was up to their knees and it took all of Conant's strength to hold his own feet and help Matty Sutton toward the mouth of the tunnel which loomed ahead of them. With a last desperate effort, Conant pushed Matty out of the tunnel and to one side. The older woman stood panting while Della still clung to her hand.

Maxine cried at them, "Watch out! Fancet means to kill you!"

Conant whipped around to see Maxine running toward them with her arms outstretched.

"Shut up, you little fool!" Fancet screamed.

Conant, though out of the tunnel, still stood in the water when Fancet fired. To his dismay, Conant realized that Fancet was firing at Maxine. If he could not possess her, he meant to see her dead!

Matty Sutton did a strange and wonderful thing for a woman of her bulk. She lunged between Maxine and Fancet just as Fancet fired. The bullet struck Matty in the chest. She lurched, struggled to stand upright but slid slowly to the ground.

Conant waited for no more. He leaped from the water and weaved forward despite the fact that his old wounds were giving him hell. He had six bullets in his gun and there were three men to kill—Fancet—Slath—Remmy.

Conant knew he had been waiting for this moment, expecting it. There was no longer any need to worry about fine points of law and jurisdiction. The thing had gone beyond the law and Conant knew that revenge was within his grasp. He saw Remmy and Slath crowding around Fancet to get the first shot. Still he weaved forward, he could not miss. Every bullet must count.

Slath's gun snarled and a bullet tugged at the sleeve of Conant's shirt. Remmy came forward, his red head hunched low. Remmy was coming too fast, too eagerly. Conant fired one shot at the red, bobbing head, but the bullet hit Remmy in the shoulder spinning him around.

Remmy caught himself and fired point-blank. Conant leaped aside, but even then the bullet tore into his hip. He fell to one knee, putting his second shot into Remmy's heart.

Slath roared, "You've played yore last hand, Lawbadge! I reckon I'm callin' the deal."

"Call and be damned," Conant growled deep in his chest as he forced himself to his feet. He staggered forward, knowing how deadly were Slath's guns, and yet not daring to fire until he was sure—sure—five feet more—two feet—now!

TWO guns barked as one. Conant felt a sledge-hammer blow in his side, but a curious absence of pain. He coughed sharply, tasted blood on his lips. Through a red blear, he saw Slath wavering around in a circle trying to get his bearings. Blood gushed from Slath's neck. Slath tried to lift his gun but the weight seemed too much for him. With a horrible, choking scream, Slath plunged forward on his face!

There was only Fancet left and Fancet, knowing that Matty Sutton was dying and that Conant was wounded and half-blind, cried triumphantly:

"It's mine, now—the Massacre, and Maxine!"

Conant, forcing the words past the froth of blood on his lips, said, "Don't count your horses too fast, Fancet!"

"I'm counting corpses, Lawman, and this time I won't need the ghost wolves! Fancet said.

Conant, shaking the blear from his eyes, saw Fancet's shiny gun flashing in the rising sun. Conant staggered forward. Bullets whanged and hissed about him. He could tell by the dull shock of his tortured body that some of them hit him. But he had three bullets for Fancet! Slath had been considerate and had required only one.

Conant planted the first bullet near the golden buckle of Fancet's snakeskin belt. He put the second one in Fancet's chest. Still Fancet came forward, mechanically, as though he had no control of his body. Fancet was still firing when he was so close that Conant could see the powder-burn stains about the nickeled muzzle of Fancet's gun.

Conant put the last bullet just over Fancet's right eye. Fancet folded up quietly and lay still. Conant knew that he, too, should fall down, but instead he turned slowly and somehow managed to reach the spot where Matty Sutton lay near death with Della and Maxine holding her hands.

Conant sat down wearily.

"I've been without a daughter for so long, and now I have two of them," Matty said quietly. "Take good care of Della, Conant. Keep the Massacre and make it into the honest ranch it should be. Send Maxine east to her father's people. She—she wasn't meant for—for the West."

Matty shuddered and lay still. Della turned, her eyes wet, and looked with concern at Conant's bloody wounds.

"Lie down, Lee," she said quietly. "You're badly hurt. I'll have to patch you up if we're going to keep the Massacre and fill it with kids."

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THE SHOOTER'S CORNER

Conducted by

PETE KUHLHOFF

Oldest Gun Company

"WHAT is the oldest arms company that is still doing business?" This is from R. S. T., a rip-snortin' shooter who hangs his hat out Utah way. He also wants to know something about the early days of said company, so gather around, folks, and let's make it a spread miserere.

One hundred and thirty years ago an American boy who worked in his father's blacksmithing shop wanted a rifle. According to tradition, he couldn't find what he wanted, and besides cash was a little scarce (I guess it has always been that way)—so he decided to roll his own. This was the first Remington rifle, made by Eliphalet Remington, Jr., in 1816 in the little community at Ilion Gorge, New York.

Young Remington's first effort evidently was pretty good, for his neighbors immediately became customers.

Pappy Remington must have seen the

light, for it wasn't long until most of the efforts in the blacksmith shop went into the making of guns. The new business grew fast.

Some years after the first gun was produced, Remington Senior died as a result of an accident, and the gun business was carried on by the son who had started the ball rolling in the first place.

Eliphalet Remington, 2nd, realizing that many of his shipping and other problems would be overcome if his shop was on or near a main thoroughfare, moved to a large tract of land, purchased by his father near the Erie Canal where the city of Ilion, New York now stands. This was in 1828.

The first construction was a low one-story building, which I believe is still standing as part of the present forging shop.

Business was soon increased by the simple expedient of supplying rifles and rifle parts wholesale to stores and gunsmiths near and far.

This is why we often find old muzzle-loading rifles with Remington stamped on the barrel (generally on the underside) as well as one or more other names. For instance, I have an old caplock target rifle with three names besides "E. Remington & Sons" stamped in the metal.

Incidentally, at this period (1835 to 1840) the machine plant amounted to four milling machines, one stocking machine, and one turning lathe, the fixtures or tools having to be changed from one operation to another.

IN 1845, Mr. Remington purchased from N. P. Ames & Co., of Springfield, Mass., a United States contract for the manufacture of several thousand Jenks army carbines together with that company's gun-finishing machinery. This was Remington's first government contract and necessitated an increase in shop capacity. So he put up what was one heck of a big building in that day. I believe it is still standing (it was, the last time I was up there) and is known as "the old Armory." These guns evidently were completed during the Mexican War.

Another contract was received even before the completion of the first, this time for 5,000 Harper's Ferry rifles. And so the business prospered.

About 1846, Philo Remington, son of

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BUY MORE BONDS
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Eliphalet 2nd, became a partner, and the firm adopted the name "E. Remington & Son."

MORE Remington youngens grew up so in 1856 there were three sons in the business. A partnership was formed and the named changed to E. Remington & Sons. Philo, the eldest son, was a typical executive and inventor like his father, and later was responsible for the Remington breechloader rifle as well as the famous Remington typewriter.

Samuel Remington was the general agent, taking care of the selling end of the business. Eliphalet Remington 3rd, the youngest son, had the gift of gab and was excellent at penmanship so he took care of all correspondence and bookkeeping.

With the Civil War coming along and the traditional problem of unpreparedness to overcome, Uncle Sam turned to the gun companies to arm soldiers for the conflict. The strain was too much for Eliphalet Remington 2nd, and he died in 1861 leaving the burden of managing the company to his three sons.

They did all right for themselves, and realizing that the day of the muzzle loader was coming to an end successfully developed the famous Remington Rolling Block breechloader which was first introduced during the war.

These guns have been used throughout the world by various armed forces, many being manufactured for such countries as Sweden, Denmark, Switzerland, Spain, Egypt, Mexico, etc. Strange as it may seem a quantity of these rolling block single-shot rifles were manufactured for France in 8-mm Lebel caliber for use in World War I.

Incidentally, I am looking for one of these rifles in 7-mm caliber (as used by the Mexican Army) for experimental purposes. If some reader knows of one I'd like very much to hear about it.

The Remington outfit also produced many handguns, the best known being the Army (.44 cal.) and the Navy (.36 cal.) cap and ball revolvers. They were first produced in 1861 and many thousand were used in the Civil War.

In 1865 the partnership was succeeded by a corporation of the same name.

After the war, repeating rifles attained

wide use and the popularity of the single-shot took to the skids.

So the Remington boys tried many repeating systems without success until they took up the bolt action repeater as designed by James Paris Lee. This gun hit the jackpot.

From about 1870 till 1885 the company tried a great many unproved designs in guns, rifles and pistols, no doubt more kinds than any other arms maker in existence. Most of them were commercial failures. In 1886 the firm hit the rocks.

The business continued under the same name, but control passed to Harley and Graham, of New York. After reorganization the name became "The Remington Arms Co." Marcellus Harley who was the dominant spirit of the new firm was also part owner of the Union Metallic Cartridge Company of Bridgeport, Conn. At his death in 1902 his grandson M. H. Dodge consolidated the gun and ammo business.

Too much expansion and unforeseen events brought on failure at the end of World War I. The company struggled along until 1934 when E. I. Du Pont de Nemours & Company acquired complete control of both Remington and U. M. C.

Remington guns are still being manufactured but it has been a long time since a member of the original Remington family has been on the job.

Air Rifle Ammo.

QUESTION: I have a German air-rifle named "Diana" Model 27. It has a rifled bore and the standard BB shot is a little too small for it. The German ammunition for this rifle resembles an Indian arrow head except it is round instead of flat. Can you advise me where I can get any such ammunition and its cost? Also is there any "ball type" or any other ammunition which would fit such a rifle?

M. A., North Carolina

ANSWER: Your Diana air rifle evidently takes the .177 cal. pellet. I have never been particularly interested in air rifles—so don't know much about them. You may procure the .177 cal. pellets from Stoeger Arms Corp., 507 5th Ave., N. Y. C., N. Y., at $1.80 per thousand plus postage for 1½ pounds. Steel darts in this caliber may be purchased for $.40 a dozen.

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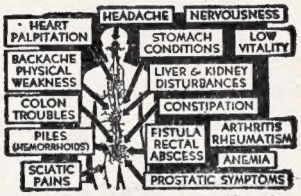

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PAYMENT TO TONDO RADANG

A novelette of the aftermath of War - - - - by KENNETH PERKINS

All in our next issue–SHORT STORIES–Sept. 25

Jezebel, that hellhootin'est of Boom Towns, was witnessing mass hysterics; Jezebel was Runnin' a High Gold Fever, Jezebel was seein' the Roast Beef of Old England poked in among the range steers of Arizony . . . no wonder the desert was mad!

"The Bucko Mates Board Jezebel"

by STEUART M. EMERY

"Precession"

The Second Officer sensed something queer on the South Atlantic run. . . .

by George Whitley

"Last Command"

From Captain McLane's life among the Redskins he knew that Indians have a sense of pride which would make a white man's look foolish. . . .

by Wilbur S. Peacock

And of course guns experts, enthusiasts and just plain nuts watch for The Shooter's Corner

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